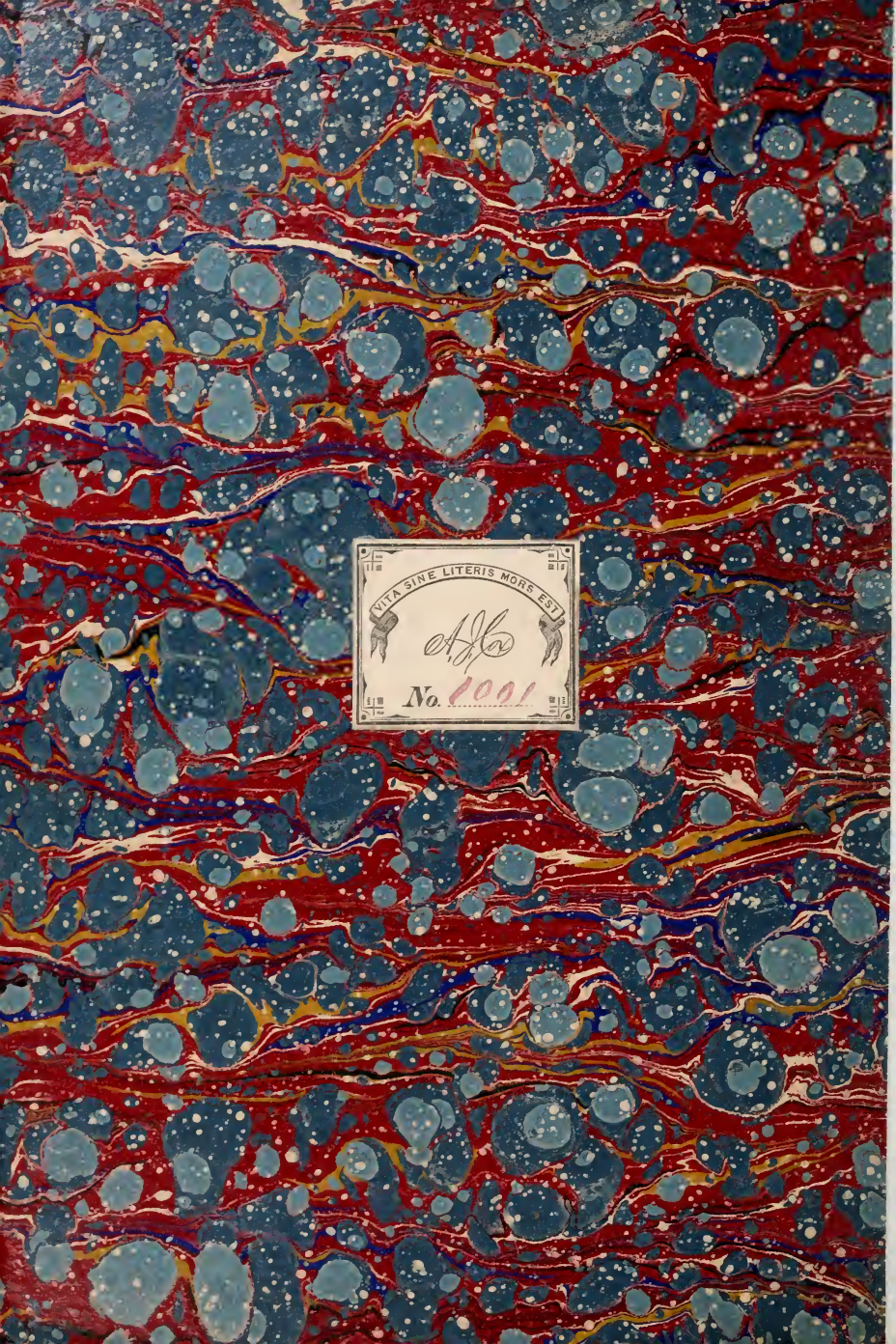
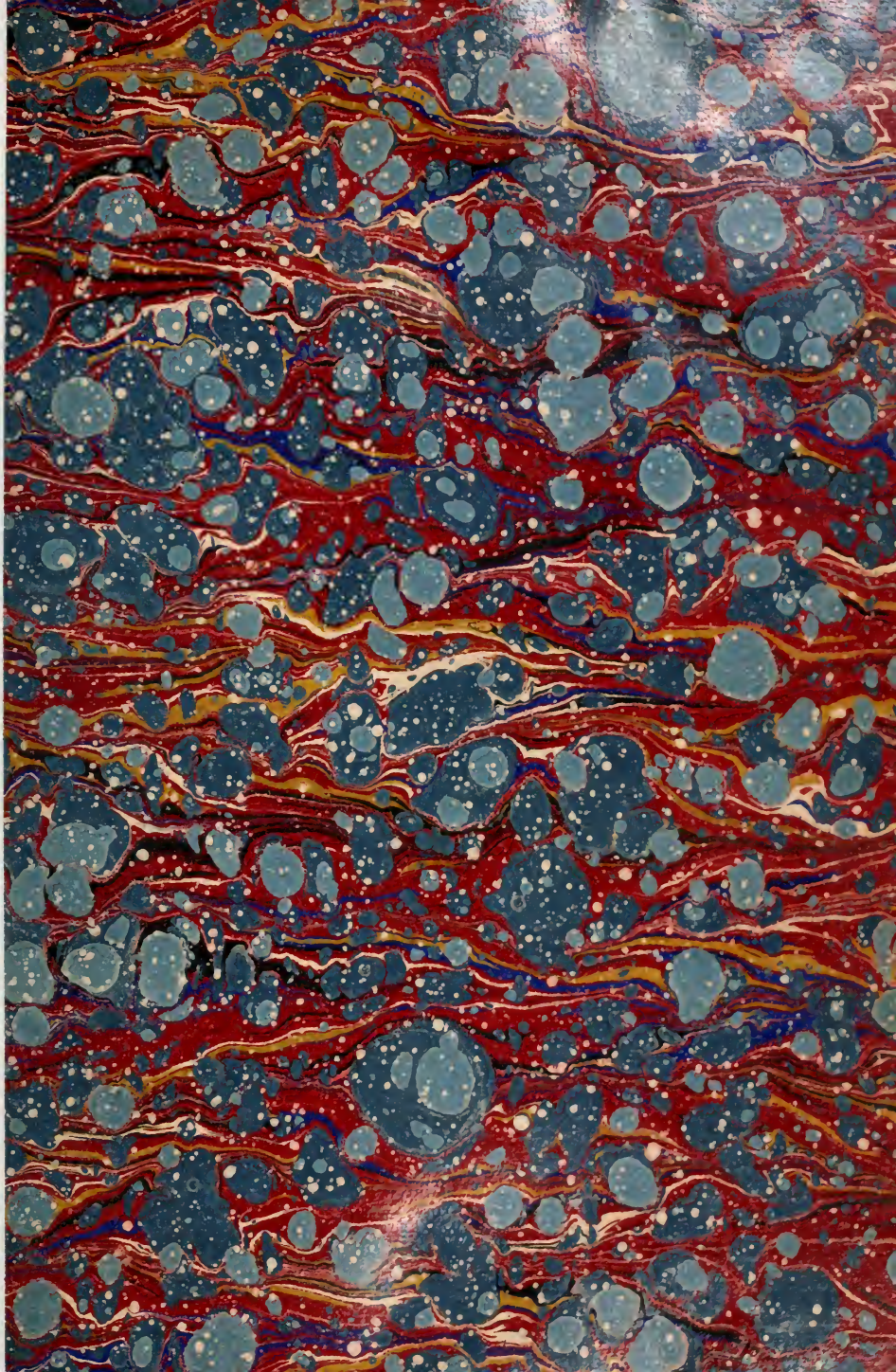
3 1761 04687515 9

H&SS
B
262


VITA SINE LITERIS MORS EST
No. 1001



By Thomas Francklin, D.D.

[1762]

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/dissertationonan00franuoft

A

DISSERTATION

ON

ANTIENT TRAGEDY.

WHILST the taſte, genius, and knowledge of the ancients, have been univerſally felt and acknowledged in every other part of polite literature, it is matter of admiration to conſider, that the Greek Theatre ſhould ſo long have remain'd in neglect and obſcurity. In philoſophy, morals, oratory, and heroic poetry, in every art and ſcience, we look back to Greece, as the ſtandard and model of perfection: the ruins of Athens afford, even to this day, freſh pleaſure and delight; and, nothing but her ſtage ſeems to be forgotten by us. Homer, Xenophon, Demoſthenes, and many other eminent Greek writers, have of late years put on an Engliſh habit, and gain'd admiſſion even into what is call'd polite company; whilſt Æſchylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, ſtill lurk in ſchools and colleges; and very ſeldom make their appearance, at leaſt with dirty leaves, in the libraries of the great. To what ſhall we attribute a judgment ſo capricious and ſo unaccountable? partly, perhaps, to the haſty ſeverity of ignorant foes, and partly, to the outrageous zeal of * miſtaken friendſhip. The fate of Antient Tragedy hath, indeed, been ſingularly unfortunate: ſome painters have drawn a too flattering likeneſs of her; whilſt others, have preſented us with nothing but a caricature; ſome exalt the Greek drama, as the moſt perfect of all human compoſitions, without the leaſt ſpot or blemiſh; whilſt others affect to call it the infant ſtate of the ſtage, weak, infirm and imperfect; and

* The remarks, which are handed down to us on Antient Tragedy, have hitherto, for the moſt part, conſiſted of mere verbal criticiſms, various readings, or general and trite exclamations of undiſtinguiſhing applauſe, made by dull and phlegmatic commentators, totally void of taſte and judgment; add to this, that the old tragedians have been ſhamefully diſguiſed and miſrepreſented to the unlearned, by the falſe medium of bad tranſlations.

as ſuch, treat it with the higheſt degree of negligence and contempt: exaggerated thus on the one hand by the extravagant encomiums of injudicious learning, and debaſed on the other by the raſh cenſures of modern petulance, it's real and intrinſic merit hath never been thoroughly known, or candidly enquired into: the beſt method however in this, as in every other diſputed point, is to ſet aſide all prejudice and authority, and determine the cauſe by our own reaſon and judgment, from a fair, full, and impartial view of it.

That the ſpectator may be able to form a proper and complete idea of any object preſented to him, it is neceſſary to place him in ſuch a ſituation, as that his eye may at once comprehend the whole, and every part of it: for this purpoſe, I have collected and ranged in order a few materials, which, in the hands of ſome abler writer, may poſſibly lay the foundation for a complete hiſtory of the Antient Drama; in the mean time, the following ſheets confine themſelves to, and pretend to no more than, a brief account of the origin and progreſs of the Greek Tragedy; it's end and purport, the ſeveral parts, properties, and conduct of it; the conſtruction, ſcenery, and decorations of the theatre; to which is added, a tranſient, but neceſſary view of the genius, character and ſituation, religion, morals and politics of the people, before whom it was repreſented; together with a ſhort ſketch of the lives and characters of the three great tragedians.

On the Origin of TRAGEDY.

NOTHING is more agreeable to the inquiſitive mind, than to trace the gradual improvement of any art or ſcience; to mark the cauſes of it's growth and culture, and purſue it through it's various ſtages of perfection: it is much to be lamented therefore, that neither Ariſtotle, nor any other writer on Antient Tragedy, hath given us an exact or regular account of it's progreſs and advancement from the time of it's birth to that of it's maturity and ſplendor; the few ſcatter'd anecdotes, which remain concerning it, rather ſerving to awaken our curioſity than to afford us any full and ſatisfactory information.

TRAGEDY was, in it's infancy, like every other production of human art, extremely weak, low, and contemptible: that wide and deep ſtream, which flows with ſuch ſtrength and rapidity through cultivated Greece, took it's riſe from a ſmall and inconſiderable fountain, which hides itſelf in the receſſes of antiquity, and is almoſt buried in oblivion: the name alone remains to give us ſome light into it's original nature, and to inform us that Tragedy, like every other ſpecies of poetry, owed it's birth to religion.

TRAGEDY, or the § ſong of the goat, was only a ſacred hymn. Bacchus, we are told, the firſt cultivator of vines, imparted his ſecret

§ From Τραγος, a goat, and ωδη, a ſong. The commentators, not content with this moſt natural and obvious interpretation, have given us ſeveral others. Some of them turn Τραγωδια into Τρυγωδια, and ſo derive it from Τρυξ, the lees

ſecret to a petty prince in Attica, named Icarius, who, happening one day to eſpy a goat, browzing on his plantations, immediately ſeized and offer'd him up as a ſacrifice to his divine benefactor: the peaſants aſſembled round their maſter, aſſiſted in the ceremony, and expreſs'd their joy and gratitude, in ſongs and dances on the occaſion; the || ſacrifice grew into a feſtival, and the feſtival into an annual ſolemnity, attended moſt probably every year with additional circumſtances, when the countrymen flock'd together in crowds, and ſung in ruſtic ſtrains the praiſes of their favourite deity. The rural ſacrifice became, in proceſs of time, a ſolemn feaſt, and aſſumed all the pomp and ſplendor of a religious ceremony; poets were employed by the magiſtrate to compoſe hymns or ſongs for the occaſion: ſuch was the rudeneſs and ſimplicity of the age, that their bards contended for a prize, which, as § Horace intimates, was ſcarce worth

lees of wine, with which we are told the actors ſmear'd their faces: others inform us, that Τρυξ ſignifies, new wine, a ſkin of which was, it ſeems, uſually given to the poet (like the butt of ſack to our laureats) as a reward for his labours: but I ſhall not trouble my reader with the enumeration of their whimſical conjectures.

|| This ſtory is told by Brumoy, and by twenty others, with little variation. It ſeems, notwithſtanding, to carry with it the air of a fiction, ſo far as it regards Icarius, who ſeems only to have been introduced becauſe Icaria was famous for vines, and (as Spon tells us in his voyage to Italy) was the firſt place where they ſacrificed a goat to Bacchus, and alſo, where tragedies and comedies were firſt exhibited; but ſurely the ſong of the goat might be accounted for, without application to any particular perſon. Bacchus, being the acknowledged inventor and cultivator of the vine, it was moſt natural that the firſt planters ſhould ſacrifice to him the deſtroyers of it; the goat being a creature as remarkably fond of the leaves of the vine, as his ſacrificer was of the juice of the grape; we ſhall find that he fell a victim not to Bacchus alone; and that the poet, as well as the god, came in for a ſhare of him.

§ Vilem certavit ob hircum. Art. Poet.

worth contending for; being no more than a goat or ſkin of wine, which was given to the happy poet, who acquitted himſelf beſt in the taſk aſſign'd to him.

This was probably the period, when Theſpis firſt pointed out the tragic path, by his introduction of a new perſonage, who relieved the Chorus or troop of ſingers, by reciting part of ſome well-known hiſtory or fable, which gave time for the Chorus to reſt. All, that the actor ‡ repeated between the ſongs of the Chorus, was call'd an epiſode or additional part; conſiſting often of different adventures, which had no connection with each other. Thus the Chorus, or ſong, which was at firſt the only, and afterwards the principal performance, became gradually and inſenſibly but an inconſiderable, though, as we ſhall ſee hereafter, a neceſſary and ornamental part of the drama.

From this time, we may imagine, the actor or reciter was more attended to than the Chorus; however his part was executed, it had the powerful charms of novelty to recommend it, and quickly obſcured the luſtre of the Chorus, whoſe ſongs were now of a different nature, inſomuch, that the original ſubject of them, the praiſe of Bacchus, was by degrees either ſlightly mention'd, or totally paſs'd over and forgotten: the prieſts, who, we may ſuppoſe, for a long time preſided over the whole, were alarm'd at ſo open a contempt of the deity, and unanimouſly exclaim'd, that all this § was nothing to Bacchus; the complaint grew into a kind of proverbial ſaying, and as ſuch is handed down to us.

From the origin of Tragedy, to the days of Theſpis, and from his time to that of Æſchylus, all is doubt, conjecture and obſcurity;

‡ When Tragedy aſſumed a regular form, theſe recitations which, during it's imperfect ſtate, were only adventitious ornaments, became the principal and conſtituent parts of the drama, the ſubject of them, drawn from one and the ſame action, retaining their firſt name of epiſode.

§ οὐδὲν πρὸς Διόνυσον.

ſcurity; neither Ariſtotle, nor any other antient writer, give us the leaſt inſight into the ſtate and progreſs of the Greek drama: if his treatiſe call'd ‖ Διδασκαλικι had reach'd poſterity, it would probably have afforded us much pleaſure and inſtruction: the names of a few, and but a few tragedians, during this dark period, are handed down to us: ſuch were § Epigenes, the Sicyonian, and Pratinas, who wrote fifty plays, thirty-two of which are ſaid to have been ſatyrical: after Theſpis, came his ſcholar Phrynicus, who wrote nine tragedies, for † one of which we are told he was fined fifty drachmas, becauſe he had made it (an odd reaſon) too deep, and too affecting: there was alſo another Phrynicus, author of ‖‖ two tragedies; to theſe we muſt add §§ Alcæus, Phormus, and ‡ Chœrilus; together with Cephiſodorus, an Athenian, who wrote the Amazons, and Apollophanes, ſuppoſed to have been the author of a tragedy, named Daulis; though Suidas is of another opinion.

Tragedy, during the lives of theſe writers, had in all probability made but a ſlow progreſs, and received very little culture or improvement, when at length the great Æſchylus aroſe, who from this rude and undigeſted chaos, created as it were a new world in the ſyſtem of letters. Poets, and even epic poets there might perhaps have been before Homer; dramatic writers there certainly were before Æſchylus, the former notwithſtanding we may with the utmoſt propriety ſtile the inventor and father of heroic

‖ This treatiſe contain'd an exact account of the names, times, and authors of all the plays that were ever acted.

§ The Bacchæ, a tragedy of his, is cited by Athenæus.

† See Strabo, Herodotus and Plutarch.

‖‖ Call'd, Andromeda and Erigone.

§§ Mention'd by Macrobius and Pollux.

‡ Chœrilus is ſaid to have written no leſs than a hundred and twenty tragedies.

heroic poetry, and the latter of the antient drama, which before his time doth not appear to have had any form, ſhape or beauty. He firſt introduced dialogue, that moſt eſſential part of tragedy, by the addition of a ſecond perſonage, threw the whole fable into action, and reſtored the chorus to it's antient dignity.

Æschylus, having like a tender parent endow'd his darling child with every mental accompliſhment, ſeem'd reſolved that no external ornaments ſhould be wanting to render her univerſally amiable: he cloathed her therefore in the moſt ſplendid habit, and beſtow'd on her every thing that art could procure to heighthen and improve her charms. We know, from good authority, that fifty years before his time Theſpis exhibited his rude performances in a cart, and beſmear'd the faces of his actors with the lees of wine, probably to diſguiſe their perſons and give them the appearance of thoſe whom they repreſented; but Æſchylus, who as being himſelf author, actor, and manager, took upon him the whole conduct of the drama, did not neglect any part of it; he improved the ſcenery and decorations, brought his actors into a regular and well-conſtructed theatre, raiſed his heroes on the cothurnus or buſkin, invented the maſques, and introduced ſplendid † habits with long trains that gave an air of majeſty and dignity to the performers.

From the time when tragedy began to aſſume a regular form, we find her cloſely following the ſteps of epic poetry; all the parts of the epopée, or heroic poem, may be traced in tragedy, though, as Ariſtotle obſerves, all the parts of tragedy are not to be found in the epopée; whence the partiſans of the ſtage with

 ſome

† ——— perſonæ, pallæque repertor honeſtæ
Æſchylus, & modicis inſtravit pulpita tignis,
Et docuit magnumque loqui, nitique cothurno. Hor.

ſome reaſon conclude, that perfection in the former is more difficult to be attain'd than in the latter. Without entring into this diſpute, we may venture however to ſtile * Homer the ſource and fountain of the Antient drama; from him the tragedians drew the plan, conſtruction, and conduct of their fables, and not unfrequently the fable itſelf; to him they applied for propriety of manners, character, ſentiment and diction.

From this æra then, we are to conſider tragedy as an elegant and noble ſtructure, built according to the rules of art, ſymmetry and proportion; whoſe every part was in itſelf fair, firm and compact, and at the ſame time contributed to the beauty, uſefulneſs and duration of the whole edifice. Sophocles and Euripides carefully ſtudied the plan laid down by Æſchylus, and by their ſuperior genius and judgment improved it in a ſhort time to it's higheſt ſtate of perfection, from which it gradually declined to the introduction of the Roman drama.

* Homer, ſays Ariſtotle, was the firſt, who μιμησεις δραματικας επoιησε, 'invented dramatic imitations.' 'There was no more left for tragedy (ſays 'Lord Shaftſbury) than to erect a ſtage, and draw his dialogues and characters into ſcenes, turning in the ſame manner upon one principal action or 'event, with regard to place and time; which was ſuitable to a real ſpectacle.' See Characteriſt. vol. II.

On the parts of Antient Tragedy.

AMONGST many other erroneous opinions concerning the Greek tragedy, adopted by modern editors and commentators, the unwarrantable diviſion, which they have made of it into ‖ acts, is perhaps the moſt remarkable, as there doth not ſeem to be the leaſt ground or foundation for it: in the firſt place, neither Athenæus, nor any of the antient writers, who have given us quotations from the Greek plays, mention the act where the ſeveral paſſages are to be found; which they would moſt naturally have done, had any ſuch diviſion ever taken place. It may be likewiſe obſerved, that the word § Act does not once occur in that treatiſe of Ariſtotle, which gives us ſo exact a definition of every part of the Greek drama; add to this, that the tragedies themſelves carry with them ſufficient proof that no ſuch thing was ever thought on by the authors of them; notwithſtanding which, † Voſſius, Barnes, and ſeveral other editors have diſcover'd an office of the chorus, which the poet never aſſign'd them, namely, their uſe in dividing the acts, the intervals of which were ſupplied

‖ See a diſſertation on this ſubject, by Monſ. Vatry, in the hiſt. de l'acad. vol. 8, p. 188.

§ The word δραμα, which we tranſlate an act, ſignifies the whole performance, or drama, and could not poſſibly therefore mean any one particular part of it.

† Chorus, ſays Voſſius, pars fabulæ poſt actum, vel inter actum & actum. See inſt. poet. l. 2.

plied by their ſongs; though it is evident that the buſineſs of the chorus (as will ſufficiently appear in the following account of it) was, on the other hand, to prevent any ſuch unnatural pauſe or vacancy in the drama, as the diviſion into acts muſt neceſſarily produce; beſides that, if we take the word act in that ſenſe, which the modern uſe of it demands, we ſhall find it in the Greek tragedies compoſed ſometimes of a ſingle ſcene, and ſometimes of half a dozen; and ‖ if the ſongs or intermedes of the chorus are to determine the number of acts, the play will conſiſt not always of five, according to our own cuſtom, but at one time of only three, and at another of ſeven or eight. § Horace has indeed told us, that there ſhould be but five acts; but it does not from thence follow that it always was ſo: the truth after all is, that this miſtake, as well as many others, aroſe from an error common to almoſt the whole race of writers and critics on antient tragedy, who have unanimouſly agreed to confound the Greek and Roman drama, concluding them both to be govern'd by the ſame laws, though they are in many parts eſſentially different: they never allow for the time between Ariſtotle and Horace, but leap from one to the other with the utmoſt agility:

‖ On looking into the choruſſes of Sophocles as they ſtand in the original, we find that the Ajax, beſides the κομμοι (which will be explain'd hereafter) has five, which are thus unequally divided; to the firſt act two; the ſecond one; the third one; the fourth one; the fifth none at all: the Trachiniæ has ſix; the Electra but three; and the Philoctetes but one regular ſong or intermede in the whole play. If it be granted therefore, as I think it is on all hands, that wherever we meet with ſtrophe and antiſtrophe, and there only we are to conceive that the chorus ſung, nothing can be more abſurd than to make thoſe ſongs dividers of the acts, when it is evident that the chorus ſung only as occaſion offer'd, and the circumſtances of the drama required, which accounts for the irregularity and difference in the numbers of them. If the reader will take the trouble to examine the antient tragedies, he will find what I have ſaid confirm'd in every one of them.

§ Neve minor, neu ſit quinto productior actu.

agility: it is plain however, from ‡ the reaſons here mention'd, that the antient Greek tragedy was one continued repreſentation from beginning to end.

The diviſion into acts therefore is undoubtedly a piece of modern refinement; which, as much may be ſaid on both ſides, I ſhall not ſtop either to condemn or approve, but proceed to the only diviſion, which the antients ever made; a diviſion, which nature points out to this and every other compoſition, viz. a § beginning, a middle, and an end; or, in the words of Ariſtotle, the prologue, the epiſode, and the exode.

The PROLOGUE of antient tragedy, was not unlike the προαυλιον or overture in muſic, or the proœmium in oratory, containing all that part of the drama, which ‡ preceded the firſt ſong, or intermede of the chorus.

What

‡ Many other reaſons equally forcible might be alledged, ſome of which the reader will find ſcatter'd about in the notes to my Tranſlation of Sophocles. I ſhall only obſerve here, that the old editions of the Greek tragedies, ſo far from dividing them into acts, do not ſo much as make the leaſt ſeparation of the ſcenes; even the names of the perſons are not always properly affix'd to the ſpeeches; no notice is taken of the entrances and exits of the actors; the aſides are never mark'd, nor any of the geſtures or actions, which frequently occur, pointed out to us in the margin; defects which, however inconſiderable, may miſlead the young and injudicious reader, and which ought therefore to be carefully ſupplied by the critic or tranſlator.

§ The cauſe and deſign of undertaking any action are the beginning; the effects of thoſe cauſes and the difficulties we find in the execution of that deſign are the middle; the unravelling and reſolving thoſe difficulties are the end. See Boſſu's treatiſe on epic poetry.

‡ Ariſtotle muſt certainly be underſtood to mean not the firſt entrance, but the firſt ſong or intermede of the chorus; becauſe, as Dacier and other writers have obſerved, there are tragedies (as the Perſæ and Suppliants of Æſchylus) where the chorus enters firſt on the ſtage and opens the play; to ſuch therefore, if Ariſtotle meant the ſpeaking and not the ſong, there would be no prologue; a contradiction, which is avoided by underſtanding what is here ſaid of the παροδος, or firſt ſong, which never begins till the prologue is over, and matter furniſh'd to the chorus for the intermede.

What Ariſtotle calls the prologue ſhould contain, according to the antient critics, all thoſe circumſtances, which are neceſſary to be known for the better underſtanding and comprehenſion of the whole drama, as, the place of the ſcene, the time when the action commences, the names and characters of the perſons concern'd, together with ſuch an inſight into the plot as might awaken the curioſity of the ſpectator without letting him too far into the deſign and conduct of it. This, however eaſy it may ſeem at firſt view, is ſo difficult, that it has ſcarce ever been perform'd to any degree of perfection. Of the Greek tragedians, Sophocles alone ſeems to have ſucceeded in this particular, the prologues of * Æſchylus being quite rude and inartificial, and thoſe of Euripides for the moſt part tedious and confuſed.

The EPISODE is all that part of the tragedy, which is between the ſongs or intermedes of the chorus: this anſwers to our ſecond, third, and fourth act, and comprehends all the intrigue or plot to the unravelling or cataſtrophe, which in the ‡ beſt

* According to this rule, the prologues of Æſchylus and Euripides will by no means ſtand the teſt of examination; that part of the tragedy, which precedes the firſt ſong of the chorus being often employ'd, by thoſe writers, either in abſurd addreſſes to the ſpectators, or in the relation of things extremely foreign to the purpoſe of the drama, frequently anticipating the incidents and circumſtances of the play, and even ſometimes acquainting the audience beforehand with the cataſtrophe; all of them capital errors, which the ſuperior judgment of Sophocles taught him carefully to avoid.

‡ Sophocles, who was certainly the moſt correct of the three great tragedians, has, I think, obſerved this rule in all his plays but two, viz. Ajax and OEdipus Tyrannus; for, if the death of Ajax is the cataſtrophe of that tragedy, it is over long before the laſt ſong of the chorus; if the leave granted to bury him be the cataſtrophe, as ſome critics contend, the Epiſode is confined within it's proper limits: but this cannot be allow'd without attributing to this piece what is a ſtill greater blemiſh, a duplicity of action; a dramatic crime, of which Sophocles in that play I am afraid cannot eaſily be acquitted.

In

beſt antient writers is not made till after the laſt ſong of the chorus; the conduct and diſpoſition of the Epiſode may be conſider'd as the ſureſt teſt of the poet's abilities, as it generally determines the merit, and decides the fate of the drama. Here all the art of the writer is neceſſary to ſtop the otherwiſe too rapid progreſs of his fable, by the intervention of ſome § new circumſtance that involves the perſons concern'd in freſh difficulties, awakens the attention of the ſpectators, and leads them as it were inſenſibly to the moſt natural concluſion and unravelling of the whole.

THE EXODE is all that part of the tragedy, which is recited after the chorus has left off ſinging; it anſwers to our fifth act, and contains the unravelling, or cataſtrophe of the piece; after which, it is remark'd by the critics, any ſong of the chorus would only be tedious and unneceſſary, becauſe what is ſaid, when the action is finiſh'd, cannot be too ſhort.

In the OEdipus Tyrannus it is obſervable, that the total diſcovery of OEdipus's guilt is made before the laſt ſong of the chorus, and becomes the ſubject of the intermede.

§ Brumoy compares the fable of a good tragedy to a large and beautiful temple, which the ſkill of the architect hath ſo contrived as to make it appear at firſt view of much leſs extent than it really is, wherein the farther you advance, the more you are ſurpriſed at the vaſt intervening ſpace, which the extraordinary ſymmetry and proportion of it's parts had conceal'd from the eye.

On the CHORUS.

WE come now to an eſſential † part of antient tragedy peculiar to itſelf: whilſt every other member of the building is univerſally admired, and induſtriouſly copied by modern architects, this alone hath been rejected and contemn'd as ungraceful and unneceſſary. The chorus, as I before obſerved, gave the firſt hint to the formation of tragedy, and was as it were the corner-ſtone of the whole edifice: as a religious ceremony it was conſider'd by the multitude with a kind of ſuperſtitious veneration; it is not therefore improbable that the firſt authors of the regular drama willingly gave way to popular prejudices, and for this, among many other reaſons, incorporated it into the body of the tragedy: accordingly, we find the chorus of Æſchylus reſuming it's original office, reciting the praiſes of the local deities, demi-gods and heroes, taking the part of diſtreſs'd virtue, and abounding throughout in all thoſe moral precepts, and religious ſentiments, by which the writings of the antients are ſo eminently and ſo honourably diſtinguiſh'd.

VARIOUS are the arguments that have from time to time been produced by the zealous partizans of antiquity, in favour of the tragic chorus, the principal of which I ſhall briefly recapitulate and lay before my readers, begging leave at the ſame time to premiſe, that whether a chorus is defenſible with regard to the antient theatre, and whether it ſhould be adopted by the modern, are two very different queſtions, though generally blended and

† Ariſtotle ranks the chorus amongſt what he calls parts of quantity, and places it after the Exode.

and confuſed by writers on this ſubject; the former may perhaps be eaſily proved, though the latter be left totally undetermined. The antients thought it highly improbable that any great, intereſting and important action ſhould be perform'd without witneſſes; their choruſſes were therefore compoſed of * ſuch perſons as moſt naturally might be ſuppoſed preſent on the occaſion; § perſons, whoſe ſituation might ſo far intereſt them in the events of the fable, as to render their preſence uſeful and neceſſary; and yet not ſo deeply concern'd as to make them incapable of performing that office, to which they were more particularly appointed, the giving proper advice, and making proper reflections on every thing that occur'd, in the courſe of the drama; for this purpoſe, a choriphæus or leader ſuperintended and directed all the reſt, ſpoke for the whole body in the dialogue part, and led the ſongs and dances in the intermede. By the introduction of a chorus, which bore a part in the action, the antients avoided the abſurdity of monologues and ſoliloquies, an error,

 which

* ' A chorus, interpoſing and bearing a part in the progreſs of the action, ' gives the repreſentation that probability and ſtriking reſemblance of real life, ' which every man of ſenſe perceives and feels the want of, upon our ſtage; ' a want, which nothing but ſuch an expedient as the chorus can poſſibly ' relieve.'

This is the remark of one of the moſt ingenious and judicious critics, which our own age or perhaps any other ever produced: the reader will find it, with many others equally juſt, p. 118 of the firſt volume of a commentary and notes on Horace's Art of Poetry, and Epiſtle to Auguſtus.

§ Thus, in the Ajax of Sophocles, the chorus is compoſed of the men of Salamis, his countrymen, and companions; in the Electra, of the principal ladies of Mycenæ, her friends and attendants; in the Philoctetes, of the companions of Ulyſſes and Neoptolemus, the only perſons, who could with any propriety be introduced. The reſt of this writer's plays, and his only, will ſtand the teſt of examination by the rule here mention'd.

which the moderns have imperceptibly and neceſſarily fallen into, from their omiſſion of it: they avoided alſo that miſerable reſource of diſtreſs'd poets, the inſipid and unintereſting race of confidentes (a refinement, for which we were indebted to the French theatre) who only appear to aſk a fooliſh queſtion, liſten to the ſecrets of their ſuperiors, and laugh or cry as they are commanded.

But the great uſe and advantage of the chorus will beſt appear, when we come to conſider it in it's moral capacity. In that illuſtrious period, which may be call'd the golden age of tragedy, the ſtage was not only the principal, but almoſt the only vehicle of inſtruction. Philoſophy applied to the liberal arts for their influence and aſſiſtance; ſhe appear'd in the theatre even before ſhe dictated in the academy, and Socrates is ſuppoſed to have deliver'd many of his excellent precepts, by the mouth of his † favourite poet: this ſufficiently accounts for the ſententious and didactic part of the antient drama; for all that profuſion of moral and religious ſentiments, which tires the patience and diſguſts the delicacy of modern readers: the critics of thoſe times were of opinion (however they may differ from our own in this particular) that the firſt and principal characters of the piece were too deeply intereſted in their own concerns, and too buſy in the proſecution of their ſeveral deſigns and purpoſes, to be at leiſure to make moral or political reflections: ſuch, therefore, they very judiciouſly for the moſt part put into the mouth of the chorus; this,

† Hence Euripides was call'd 'ο επι της σκηνης φιλοσοφος' 'the philoſopher of the theatre,' 'in iis (ſays Quintilian) quæ a ſapientibus tradita ſunt, ipſis 'pæne par.' With regard to Socrates, his friendſhip with this poet is univerſally known, 'εδοκει σωμποιειν Ευριπιδη,' ſays Diogenes Laertius. The comic poets of that time did not ſcruple to aſcribe ſeveral of Euripides's plays to Socrates, as they afterwards did thoſe of Terence to Lælius and Scipio.

this, at the ſame time, ‖ prevented the illiterate, and undiſtinguiſhing part of the audience, from miſtaking the characters, or drawing haſty and falſe concluſions from the incidents and circumſtances of the drama: the poet by this means leading them as it were inſenſibly into ſuch ſentiments and affections as he had intended to excite, and a conviction of thoſe moral and religious truths, which he meant to inculcate.

But the chorus had likewiſe another ‡ office, which was, to relieve the ſpectator, during the pauſes and intervals of the action, by an ode or ſong adapted to the occaſion, naturally ariſing from the incidents, and * connected with the ſubject of the drama: here

‖ Euripides being obliged to put ſome bold and impious ſentiments into the mouth of a wicked character, the audience were angry with the poet, and look'd upon him as the real villain, whom his actor repreſented: the ſtory is told by Seneca. 'Now if ſuch an audience (ſays the ingenious writer, whom 'I quoted above) could ſo eaſily miſinterpret an attention to the truth of cha-'racter into the real doctrine of the poet, and this too, when a chorus was at 'hand to correct and diſabuſe their judgments, what muſt be the caſe when 'the whole is left to the ſagacity and penetration of the people?'

‡ The office of the chorus is divided by Ariſtotle into three parts, which he calls παρῳδὸς, στασιμον, and κομμοι; the parodos is the firſt ſong of the chorus; the ſtaſimon is all that which the chorus ſings after it has taken poſſeſſion of the ſtage, and is incorporated into the action; and the commoi are thoſe lamentations ſo frequent in the Greek writers, which the chorus and the actors make together. See the ſecond ſcene of the ſecond act of Ajax, in my tranſlation; Philoctetes, act one, ſcene three; the beginning of the OEdipus Coloneus, together with many other parts of Sophocles's tragedies, where the commoi are eaſily diſtinguiſhable from the regular ſongs of the chorus.

* ——Neu quid medios intercinat actus
Quod non propoſito conducat & hæreat apte. Hor.

This connection with the ſubject of the drama, ſo eſſentially neceſſary to a good chorus, is not always to be found in the tragedies of Æſchylus and Euripides, the latter of which is greatly blamed by Ariſtotle for his careleſsneſs in this important particular; the correct Sophocles alone hath ſtrictly obſerved it.

here the author generally gave a looſe to his imagination, diſplay'd his poetical abilities, and ſometimes, perhaps too often, wander'd from the ſcene of action into the regions of fancy; the audience notwithſtanding were pleaſed with this ſhort relaxation, and agreeable variety; ſooth'd by the power of numbers and the excellency of the compoſition, they eaſily forgave the writer, and return'd as it were with double attention to his proſecution of the main ſubject: to this part of the antient chorus we are indebted for ſome of the nobleſt flights of poetry, as well as the fineſt ſentiments that adorn the writing of the Greek tragedians. The number of perſons compoſing the chorus was probably at firſt indeterminate, varying according to the circumſtances and plot of the drama. Æſchylus, we are told, brought no leſs than fifty into his ‖ Eumenides, but was obliged to reduce them to twelve; Sophocles was afterwards permitted to add three; a limitation, which we have reaſon to imagine became a rule to ſucceeding poets.

When the chorus conſiſted of fifteen, the perſons compoſing it ranged themſelves in three rows of five each, or five rows of three; and in this order advanced or retreated from the right hand to the left, which is call'd § ſtrophe, and then back from the

‖ In the Eumenides of Æſchylus, the chorus conſiſted of fifty furies, whoſe habits, geſture, and whole appearance was by the art of the poet render'd ſo formidable as to frighten the whole audience; an accident, which ſo alarm'd the public, that a decree was immediately iſſued to limit the number of the chorus.

§ It does not appear that the old tragedians confined themſelves to any ſtrict rules, with regard to the diviſion of ſtrophe, antiſtrophe and epode, as we find the choral ſongs conſiſting ſometimes of a ſtrophe only, ſometimes of ſtrophe and antiſtrophe, without the epode; the obſerving reader will find many other irregularities of this kind in a peruſal of the Greek tragedies.

the left to the right, which we call antiſtrophe; after which they ſtood ſtill in the midſt of the ſtage, and ſung the epode. ‖ Some writers attribute the original of theſe evolutions to a myſterious imitation of the motion of the heavens, ſtars, and planets, but the conjecture ſeems rather whimſical. The dance, we may imagine, (if ſo we may venture to call it) was ſlow and ſolemn, or quick and lively, according to the words, ſentiments, and occaſion; and, in ſo ſpacious a theatre as that of Athens, might admit of ſuch grace and variety in it's motions as would render it extremely agreeable to the ſpectators: the petulancy of modern criticiſm has frequently made bold to ridicule the uſe of ſong and dance in antient tragedy, not conſidering (as Brumoy obſerves) that dancing is, in reality, only a more graceful way of moving, and muſic but a more agreeable manner of expreſſion; nor, indeed, can any good reaſon be aſſign'd why they ſhould not be admitted, if properly introduced and carefully managed, into the moſt ſerious compoſitions. To ſay the truth, nothing is more aſtoniſhing than the prejudices we entertain, and the partiality we ſhew, with regard to our own modes and cuſtoms: we condemn the choruſſes of the antients, which ſupplied with decency and propriety the vacant parts of the drama; and how do we fill up our own? To be convinced of our injuſtice and abſurdity, let us ſuppoſe Sophocles, or Euripides, tranſported from the ſhades of elyſium, and entering one of our noiſy theatres, between the acts; the audience engaged in bowing or talking to each other, and the muſic entertaining them

‖ 'Le Chœur (ſays Brumoy) alloit de droite à gauche, pour exprimer le 'cours journalier du firmament d'orient en occident, ce tour ſ'appelloit ſtrophe; 'il declinoit enſuite de gauche à droite, par égard aux planettes, qui outre le 'mouvement commun ont encore le leur particulier d'occident vers l'orient, 'c'etoit l'antiſtrophe, ou le retour; enfin le chœur s'arretoit au milieu du theâtre 'pour y chanter un morceau qu'on nommoit epode, & pour marquer par 'cette ſituation la ſtabilité de la terre.'

them with a jig of Vivaldi, or the roaſt beef of old England, how would they be ſurpriſed in a few minutes to find that all this diſorder, riot, and confuſion, was in the midſt of a moſt pathetic and intereſting tragedy, and that the warmeſt paſſions of the human heart were broken in upon and enfeebled by this ſtrange and unnatural interruption!

The chorus continued on the ſtage during the whole repreſentation of the piece, unleſs when ſome very † extraordinary circumſtance required their abſence; this obliged the poet to a continuity of action, as the chorus could not have any excuſe for remaining on the ſpot, when the affair, which call'd them together, was at an end; it preſerved alſo the unity of time; for if the poet, as * Hedelin obſerves, had comprehended in his play a week, a month, or a year, how could the ſpectators be made to believe that the people, who were before them, could have paſs'd ſo long a time without eating, drinking, or ſleeping? Thus we find that the chorus preſerved all the unities of action, time, and place; that it prepared the incidents, and inculcated the moral of the piece; relieved and amuſed the ſpectators, preſided over and directed the muſic, made a part of the decoration, and in ſhort pervaded and animated the whole; it render'd the poem more regular, more probable, more pathetic, more noble and magnificent; it was indeed the great chain, which held together and

† As in the Ajax of Sophocles, where the chorus leave the ſtage in ſearch of that hero, and by that means give him an opportunity of killing himſelf in the very ſpot, which they had quitted, and which could not have been done with any propriety whilſt they were preſent, and able to prevent it: on theſe occaſions, the chorus frequently divided itſelf into two parts, or ſemichoruſſes, and ſung alternately.

* See his whole art of the ſtage, page 129, of the Engliſh tranſlation.

and ſtrengthen'd the ſeveral parts of the drama, which without it could only have exhibited a lifeleſs and unintereſting ſcene of irregularity, darkneſs and confuſion.

The antient chorus notwithſtanding, with all it's advantages, is not agreeable to every taſte; it hath been attack'd with great ſeverity, and treated with the utmoſt contempt; it hath been call'd arrant pedantry, an excreſcency of the drama, a mob of confidents; even writers of approved genius and judgment have ſaid, that it is abſurd to imagine the antients would ever have truſted their ſecrets, eſpecially thoſe of a criminal nature, to all their domeſtics; that it is impoſſible to imagine that fifty, or even fifteen people can keep a ſecret, fifteen people of the ſame mind, thought, voice, and expreſſion.

It muſt be acknowledged, that theſe critics have ſelected that part of the office of the chorus, which is moſt liable to cenſure; but even if we allow the objection it's full force, it will not ſuffice to condemn the chorus itſelf, which in the judicious Sophocles, who avoided the errors and abſurdities of his cotemporaries, is unexceptionable: in that noble author, nothing is entruſted to the chorus, which ought to be conceal'd; nor any thing conceal'd, which ought to be imparted to them; we might therefore perhaps, with equal juſtice, baniſh from our own ſtage, the general practice of ſoliloquies, becauſe Shakeſpear hath frequently drawn them out to an immoderate length, as utterly condemn the whole antient chorus, becauſe Euripides hath in two or three of his plays, made an improper uſe of it.

'Who ſhall decide, when doctors diſagree?'

Some applaud the chorus with a kind of enthuſiaſtic rapture, whilſt others endeavour to ſink it into univerſal contempt: for my own part, I cannot but think it abſolutely neceſſary on the antient ſtage, and that it might be render'd uſeful and ornamental, even on our own.

I am notwithſtanding far from being of opinion, that it ſhould be admitted conſtantly and indiſcriminately into the modern theatre; the uſe of it muſt depend entirely on the ſubject: certain it is, that there are many in our own hiſtory, as well as in that of other nations, where a chorus might be introduced with the utmoſt propriety; but if, after all, faſhion and prejudice will not ſuffer them to appear on the ſtage, they may at leaſt gain admiſſion to the cloſet; thither let the reader of true taſte and judgment carry Elfrida and Caractacus, written on the antient model, and compare them with Athelſtan, Barbaroſſa, the ‡ Orphan of China, or any of thoſe tinſel flimſy performances that have lately aſſumed the name of tragedies, which have owed all their ſucceſs to the falſe taſte of the age, join'd to the real merit of the actors in the repreſentation of them.

‡ A bombaſt and ſpiritleſs performance, written by one Murphy, formerly a wretched actor; now a ſtill more wretched dramatic author.

On the Verſe, Recitation, and Muſic of Antient Tragedy.

THE art of poetry was conſider'd by the antients as a part of that general ſyſtem, which they term'd the μελοποιια, or melody, and was in reality the art of making verſes proper to be ſung: they look'd upon words, not only as ſigns of particular ideas, but as ſounds alſo, enabled by the aſſiſtance of muſic to expreſs all the paſſions of the human mind. When in the deſcriptive parts of the drama a dreadful or diſagreeable object was to be repreſented, the words were form'd of ſuch harſh and jarring ſyllables, as by grating on the ear might beſt impreſs the exacteſt repreſentation of it; and in like manner, when the grand, the beautiful, or the tender was to be ſet before the eyes of the ſpectator, the language was carefully and even painfully adapted to it. The Greeks, who were extremely ſolicitous to cultivate and improve their language to the higheſt degree of perfection, took more than ordinary care in the formation of their verſe; the quantity of every ſyllable was carefully aſcertain'd, different words, different dialects, and different feet, were appropriated to different ſpecies of poetry; and none infringed on the rights and privileges of another: Tragedy indeed, as the ſovereign, aſſumed a kind of peculiar title to them all; every ſpecies of verſe was occaſionally introduced to adorn and beautify the drama. The iambic was generally made uſe of in the body of the piece, as approaching, according to the judgment of Ariſtotle, neareſt to common diſcourſe, and therefore moſt naturally adapted

to the dialogue; this rule however is not conſtantly and invariably obſerved, but ſometimes departed from with judgment; the metre is frequently changed, not only in the ſongs of the chorus, but in other places, and that generally in the moſt intereſting and impaſſion'd parts of the drama, where, it may here be obſerved, it is moſt probable that the muſic and inſtruments accompanying the verſe were changed alſo; a happy circumſtance for the poet, as it muſt have afforded an agreeable relief to the audience, who would naturally be fatigued by the repetition of the ſame ſounds, be they ever ſo harmonious. || If our own times, manners, and taſte, would admit of ſuch variations, what additional beauties would they reflect on the Britiſh theatre! but ſuch a change of metre in ſerious dramatic performances is render'd abſolutely impoſſible, as well from many other obſtacles, as from the ‡ poverty of our language, when put in compariſon with thoſe of antiquity; particularly that of Greece, whoſe ſuperiority over us in this reſpect is ſo remarkably viſible. On the antient

|| Since the expulſion of tragedies in rhime, of all things doubtleſs the moſt abſurd, ſome of our beſt poets have introduced what is call'd a tag, conſiſting of three or four couplets, at the end of every act, to relieve the ear from the monotony of blank verſe; but even this is now exploded, and we are confined to the repetition of the ſame continued metre, from beginning to end.

‡ 'It muſt be confeſs'd (ſays a very judicious writer) that all the modern 'languages fall infinitely ſhort of the antients in this point; both the Greek 'and Latin tongues aſſign'd for the pronunciation of each ſyllable an exact 'meaſure of time, in ſome longer, in ſome ſhorter, and ſo variouſly intermix'd 'thoſe two different meaſures in the ſame word, as furniſh'd means for that 'variety of verſification, to which we are altogether ſtrangers.' See a book entituled, Obſervations on Poetry, printed for Dodſley in 1738, p. 108, in the chapter on verſification; where the reader will meet with many ſenſible remarks on this ſubject.

antient ſtage, the length or ſhortneſs of every ſyllable was as it were fix'd and determined, either by nature or by uſe; hence the ſong had a neceſſary and agreeable conformity with common diſcourſe, which render'd it more intelligible: our * muſicians, in the compoſition of their ſongs, make ſhort ſyllables long, and long ſhort, as it ſuits the air, or recitative; and whilſt the muſic pleaſes the ear, the words frequently offend it: if the poet and muſician were always united in one perſon, which very ſeldom happens, this inconvenience might, with all the diſadvantages of our language, be in a great meaſure leſſen'd, if not entirely removed.

It is more than probable, and nearly demonſtrable, that the theatrical declamation of the antients was compoſed and wrote in notes, and that the whole play, from beginning to end, (except the commoi and choruſſes) were in a kind of § recitative like our modern operas; that it was ‖ accompanied with muſic

 throughout

* 'Our different cadences, (ſays the elegant author of Elfrida) our diviſions, variations, repetitions, without which modern muſic cannot ſubſiſt, 'are entirely improper for the expreſſion of poetry, and were ſcarce known to 'the antients.'

§ It is the opinion of P. Meneſtrier, and ſeveral other learned men, that the cuſtom of chanting in churches was originally taken from the antient ſtage: as the theatres were open at the commencement of the chriſtian æra, it is not improbable, but that the common people might recite our Saviour's paſſion after the manner of the tragedians; certain however it is, that in our own nation, as well as in many others, the firſt tragedies exhibited were on religious ſubjects, and in ſome places continue ſo even to this day.

‖ The μελοποια, or melody, is mention'd by Ariſtotle, as one of the ſix eſſential parts of tragedy, and conſequently muſt have been conſider'd by him not as confined to the chorus, but diffuſing itſelf through the whole drama.

In

throughout, and that the reciter had little elſe to do, than carefully to obſerve the directions of the poet; the quantity of every word was aſcertain'd, the time, duration, and rhythmus of every ſyllable fix'd by the muſician, ſo that he could not eaſily miſtake or offend; the actor was not, as on our ſtage, left at liberty to murther fine ſentiment and language, by wrong accents and falſe pronunciation; by hurrying over ſome parts with precipitancy, and drawling out others into a tedious monotony; a good voice and a tolerable ear were all that the poet required of him.

MUSIC is rank'd by Ariſtotle amongſt the eſſential parts of tragedy; nor is there the leaſt reaſon to doubt but that it was conſider'd by the antients both as uſeful and ornamental: it was moſt probably diffuſed throughout the whole piece, accompanying the recitation in the dialogue, directing the voice, and even perhaps the § action and geſture of the performers; varying it's movements according to the different paſſions to be excited in the breaſts of the audience; it's different meaſures were always carefully † adapted to the metre, and took their names from

In the 19th chapter of his problems, he aſks why the tragic choruſſes never ſing in the hypodorian, or hypophrygian mood, which are both employ'd in the ſcenes; from which paſſage, as well as many others that might be quoted, it is evident that they ſung both in the ſcenes, or dialogue part, and in the chorus alſo.

§ In the third volume of L'Abbé du Bos's critical reflections on poetry, painting, and muſic; the whole eleventh chapter is employ'd in proving, or rather endeavouring to prove, that amongſt the Romans the theatrical declamation was divided between two actors, one of whom pronounced, whilſt the other executed the geſticulation—I refer my readers to the book itſelf, where they will find many ingenious remarks on the theatrical repreſentations of the antients.

† St. Auſtin has written a treatiſe, expreſly to reconcile the various meaſures of antient verſe with the principles of muſic.

from the different feet made uſe of in the verſe, as the dactylic, the ionic, pœonic, and the reſt; the principal exertion of it's powers muſt, we may imagine, have been reſerved for the ſongs, or intermedes of the chorus, where both the poetry and muſic admitted of much greater freedom and variety than in the other parts of the drama: thus we ſee, in the Antient Theatre, muſic always accompanied her ſiſter ſcience, aſſiſted, animated, and ſupported her, was in ſhort, in all reſpects, her friend and fellow-labourer,

Qualem decet eſſe ſororem.

The office of a dramatic poet, in the time of antient tragedy, required, we may obſerve, a wider circle of knowledge, and far more extenſive abilities, than the preſent age demands, or expects from him: for, beſides all the other requiſites, it was neceſſary that he ſhould be maſter of every kind of verſe, completely ſkill'd in muſic, and able to direct all the evolutions, movements, or (if ſo we chuſe to call them) the dances of the chorus; Euripides, we are told, inſtructed his ſingers in the grave and ſolemn airs, which accompanied all his pieces; and Plutarch informs us, that the people of Suſæ, and the Perſians, by the command of Alexander, ſung the tragedies of Sophocles, and his ſucceſſors in the drama, according to the meaſures, which thoſe writers had themſelves preſcribed at the firſt repreſentation of them.

Tragedy was in it's infancy, what Ariſtotle calls it, ‡ made up of muſic and dancing; and the old tragedians, Theſpis, Pratinas, Cratinus, and Phrynicus, according to Athenæus, bore the name of * dancers, becauſe they uſed ſo much dancing in their choruſſes! Tetrameters were therefore for a long time made uſe of in

‡ Ορχηστικωτερα.

* Ορχηστικοι.

in the verſe, as that foot was moſt proper for motion, though it was afterwards changed to the iambic; when the dance or || movement was confined to the ſongs or intermedes of the chorus, which in the more perfect ſtate of tragedy became, as I before obſerved, but a ſmall part of the whole drama. What inſtruments the antients made uſe of in their theatrical muſic, and in what it's principal merit conſiſted, it is perhaps at this diſtance of time not eaſy to determine; if any of my readers are deſirous of prying into a ſubject ſo dark and intricate, I muſt refer them to Plutarch's dialogue on this ſubject, together with Monſ. Burette's obſervations on it in the tenth volume of the hiſt. de l'Acad. to which may be added P. Meneſtrier's diſſertation on antient and modern muſic, where they will meet with as much information as I believe can be given them on this head.

The uſe of muſic in tragedy hath been matter of much doubt and contention with modern critics; M. Dacier thinks it by no means eſſential, and greatly condemns Ariſtotle for his approbation of it; it is notwithſtanding indiſputable, that on the antitient ſtage, muſic was a moſt beautiful adjunct to poetry, and contributed in a great meaſure to the high finiſhing and perfection of the Greek drama: we cannot perhaps ſo eaſily reſolve, how far it may be reconcileable to modern manners, though from ſome late experiments on § one of our theatres, we have reaſon to think that, when introduced with propriety, it might be attended with it's deſired effect.

On

|| This movement was probably (as an excellent critic obſerves) becoming, graceful and majeſtic, as appears from the name uſually given it, εμμελεια, 'this word (ſays he) cannot well be tranſlated into our language, but expreſſes all that grace and concinnity of motion which the dignity of the choral ſong required.' See notes on the art of poetry. v. 1, p. 151.

§ In the repreſentation of Merope, the ſolemnity of the ſacrifice ſcene is greatly heighten'd by the muſic and ſong; the judicious manager of Drury-lane theatre has introduced it into ſeveral other tragedies with ſucceſs.

On the Conſtruction of the Greek Theatre.

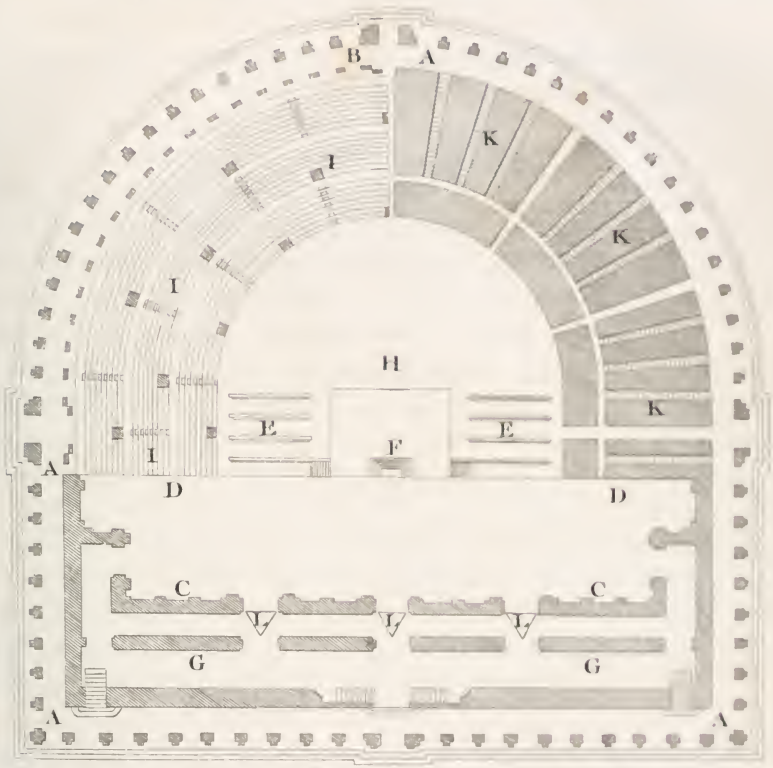
THE GREEK THEATRE is amongſt thoſe ſuperb monuments of antient taſte, genius and magnificence, which would probably have ſurvived the depredations, even of time itſelf, if ignorance and barbariſm had not conſpired to ruin and deſtroy it: of all thoſe noble and coſtly ſtructures which Athens, and Sparta dedicated to the muſes, we have now ſcarce any thing but a few inconſiderable remains, ſufficiently ſtriking to raiſe our curioſity, but at the ſame time too mutilated and imperfect to ſatisfy it. Thoſe writers of antiquity, who have occaſionally mention'd the conſtruction of the theatre, as they treated a ſubject univerſally known by their cotemporaries, did not think themſelves obliged to handle it with that degree of accuracy and preciſion, which were ſo neceſſary for the information of poſterity; in conſequence of which, they frequently gave names to one part of the building that more properly belong'd to another, and by a confuſion of terms, which could not miſlead the readers of their own times, involved their ſucceſſors in a labyrinth of error and obſcurity; add to this, that the ſame fate hath attended the deſcription of the building, which had before happen'd to the ſeveral conſtituent parts of the drama; modern critics too often confound together the Greek and Roman theatre (though they differ moſt eſſentially in many parts) we find terms frequently appropriated to one, which belong only to the other; and the whole ſo imperfectly delineated, by almoſt every one of them, as to render it throughout a matter of doubt and uncertainty. Some lights however have from time to time been thrown on this dark and intricate ſubject, whoſe ſcatter'd rays, when united and drawn to a point, will exhibit to us the following tolerably accurate, though ſtill imperfect repreſentation of it.

THE

THE ANTIENT GREEK THEATRE, in it's higheſt ſtate of perfection, was a moſt ſpacious, noble, and magnificent ſtructure, built with the moſt § ſolid and durable materials, and capable, we are told, of holding thirty thouſand ſpectators: to give my readers a proper idea of it's form, I ſhall divide it into three principal departments; one for the actors, which they call'd the ſcene; another for the ſpectators, under the general denomination of the theatre; and a third call'd the orcheſtra, allotted to the muſic, mimes, and dancers. To determine the ſituation of theſe three parts, and conſequently the diſpoſition of the whole, it is neceſſary to obſerve, that the plan (here annex'd) conſiſts on one ſide of two ſemi-circles, drawn from the ſame centre, but of different diameters; and on the other, of a ſquare of the ſame length, but leſs by one half; the ſpace between the two ſemi-circles, was allotted for the ſpectators; the ſquare at the end, to the actors; and the intervening area in the middle, to the orcheſtra. Thus we ſee, the theatre was circular on one ſide, and ſquare on the other; round the whole were ranges of porticos, (ſee letters A and B) more or leſs, according to the number of ſtories, the moſt magnificent theatres always having three, one raiſed above another; to theſe porticos, which might properly be ſaid to form the body of the edifice, the women were admitted,

§ The theatre at Athens was originally built with wood, but being one day remarkably crowded on the exhibition of a tragedy, written by Pratinas, the benches fell in, many of the ſpectators were kill'd, and the whole fabric buried in ruins: this melancholy accident induced the Athenians, naturally fond of ſpectacles, to ſet about the conſtruction of thoſe ſuperb edifices, which they afterwards made uſe of, built with the moſt coſtly marble, and adorn'd with every thing that could render them ſolid, noble, ſplendid, and magnificent.

PLAN of a GREEK THEATRE.



A. *Lower Portico.*
B. *Upper or third Portico.*
C. *The Scene.*
D. *The Proscenium.*
E. *The Hyposcenium.*
F. *The Thymele.*
G. *The Parascenium.*
H. *The Orchestra.*
I. *The Seats.*
K. *The Stair-cases.*
L. *Triangular Machines for the Scenery.*

admitted, being the only places cover'd from rain and heat; the reſt were intirely ‖ open above, and all the repreſentations in the † day-time.

The ſeats for the ſpectators (letter I) extended from the upper portico, down quite to the orcheſtra (letter H) differing in their width and number with the ſize of the theatre, and were always ſo form'd, that a line drawn from the top to the bottom, would touch the extremities of every one of them; between each ſtory was a wide paſſage leading to the ſeats, every one of which, for the better accommodation of the audience, was at ſuch a diſtance from the ſeat placed over it, that the feet of the perſons above could not touch thoſe who were below.

The magiſtrates were ſeparated from the populace by a place appropriated to them call'd Βελευτικος: the Εφηβικος, or ſeat of the youths, was aſſign'd to the young men of quality and diſtinction; there were alſo ſome προεδριαι, or firſt ſeats, allotted to perſons of extraordinary merit, where all thoſe were placed, who had diſtinguiſh'd themſelves by any ſignal ſervices to the common-wealth; ſuch in proceſs of time became hereditary, and were appointed for particular families; all theſe were very near to, or ſometimes in the orcheſtra, and as cloſe as the ſtructure of the theatre would admit, to the ſcene, or place of repreſentation.

‖ The amphitheatres in Spain were formerly built ſomething in this manner, having no roof, ſo that the ſpectators were often expoſed to rain, heat, and all the inclemency of the ſeaſons.

† In many cities of the two Lombardies (as Riccoboni informs us) the ſpring of the year is allotted for comedies, which are repreſented in the day-time without any lights, the play-houſes being built in ſuch a manner as to be ſufficiently enlighten'd by the ſun: and, in the year 1699, a regulation was made in France, by the civil magiſtrate, by which the players were order'd to open their doors at one o'clock, to begin the entertainment at two, and to put an end to it at half an hour after four.

THE orcheſtra, being between the two parts of the building, one of which was circular, and the other ſquare, partook of the ſhape of both, varying in it's ſize according to that of the theatre, though it's width was always double it's length, and that width always the ſemi-diameter of the whole edifice; to this they enter'd by paſſages under the ſeats of the ſpectators, the whole being intirely on a ‡ level with the ground; this led alſo to the ſtair-caſes, (letter K) by § which they aſcended to the different ſtories of the theatre, ſome leading to the ſeats, others to the porticos, of courſe turn'd different ways, but all equally wide, diſengaged from each other, and ſo commodious as to give ſufficient room for the ſpectators to go in and out without the leaſt crowding or inconvenience.

BETWEEN the orcheſtra and the ſtage was the υποσκηνιον, hypoſcenium (letter E) ſo call'd, becauſe it was cloſe to the ſcene or place of repreſentation: here, it is moſt probable, were placed the inſtruments that accompanied the actors throughout the drama.

* BEYOND this was the large and vacant ſpace call'd προσκηνιον, proſcenium, or λογειον (letter D) repreſenting the ſcene of action, which was always ſome public place, as a road, a grove, a court-yard,

‡ In the Roman theatre, the ſenators and chief magiſtrates frequently ſat in the orcheſtra, where finding the inconveniency of the level, it was remedied by raiſing the ſeats a little above each other.

§ Monſ. Boindin reckons up very accurately the number of the ſtair-caſes, and of the ſeats, together with many other minute particulars; what I have extracted from him may ſuffice to give the reader a general idea of the whole ſtructure; if the curious in architecture are deſirous of farther information, I muſt refer them to the diſcourſe itſelf, which they will find in the firſt volume of the hiſt. de le acad. quarto edition, p. 136.

* Between this part and the proſcenium, Mr. Boindin places the Greek Θυμελη, or thymele (letter F) ſo call'd becauſe in ſhape it reſembled an altar: here,

yard, adjoining to ſome temple or palace; the length and breadth of this area or ſtage varied according to the ſize of the theatre, but always of the ſame heighth, and in the Greek theatre never more or leſs than ten foot.

At the extremity of the whole building, was the παρασκηνιον, or poſt-ſcenium (letter G) that place behind the ſcenes, where the actors dreſs'd themſelves, and prepared the habits, ſcenes, machines, and every thing neceſſary to the repreſentation.

At the back of the ſtage (letter L) were the triangular machines for the ſcenery, call'd by the Greeks ‖ περιακτοι, which as they turn'd on their own axis, might be ſhifted on any occaſion, and exhibited three different views or changes of ſcene; theſe were not made uſe of in tragedy, which required but one ſcene throughout, but moſt probably at the end of it, to prepare the exhibition of the comedy or mime, which in the antient theatre frequently ſucceeded each other, perhaps two or three times on the ſame day.

here, he imagines, the chorus was placed, and perform'd their ſongs and dances: but this place, with all due deference to that ingenious critic, could by no means be allotted to the chorus, being much too diſtant from the ſtage, where, we know from the tragedies themſelves, the chorus muſt always be, as, beſides the ſongs or intermedes, it bears a part in the dialogue throughout the piece, and conſequently muſt ſtand cloſe to the other actors.

‖ Utrimque aliæ interdum portæ quarum in poſtibus affixæ machinæ περιακτοι dictæ, quæ pro re ac tempore circumagebantur. Suid. To theſe Virgil is ſuppoſed to allude in the third book of the Georgics.

Vel ſcena ut verſis diſcedat frontibus———

Which is thus explain'd by Servius. 'Scena, (ſays he) quæ fiebat aut verſilis aut ductilis; verſilis tunc erat cùm ſubito a machinis convertebatur, & aliam picturæ faciem oſtendebat; ductilis tunc cum tractis tabulatis hâc atque illâc ſpecies picturæ nudabatur interior.' What Virgil mentions, was probably an improvement on the περιακτοι, as practiced in the Roman theatre.

AMONGST the many peculiarities of the Greek theatre, with regard to it's conſtruction, there is not perhaps any thing ſo remarkable, and which we can ſo difficultly form any idea of, as the echœa, or brazen veſſels, which, according to † Vitruvius, were made uſe of by the Greeks, to render the articulation diſtinct, and give a more extenſive power to the voice, an expedient doubtleſs extremely neceſſary in ſo large a theatre; for this purpoſe we are told, that they had recourſe to ſeveral round concave plates of braſs, placed under the ſeats of the ſpectators, ſo diſpoſed and contrived by the moſt exact geometrical and harmonic proportions as to reverberate the voice, and carry the words of the actor to the fartheſt part of the building; the manner in which this was perform'd is, I muſt confeſs, to me utterly incomprehenſible; certain it is, that no idea can be form'd of it without the moſt profound knowledge of antient muſic, and antient architecture: I ſhall not therefore trouble my readers with an explication of what few I believe would be able to comprehend; but if any of them are deſirous of a more intimate acquaintance with theſe Brazen Echos, I muſt refer them to the ſixth book of the learned Vitruvius, and Monſ. Burette's treatiſe on antient muſic.

† Vaſa ærea, (ſays Vitruvius) quæ in cellis ſub gradibus mathematica ratione collocantur, ad ſymphonias muſicas, ſive concentus, ita componuntur uti vox ſcenici ſonitus conveniens in diſpoſitionibus tactu cum offenderit, aucta cum incremento clarior ac ſuavior ad ſpectatorum perveniat aures.

To theſe echœa it is ſuppoſed, Caſſiodorus alludes, where he ſays, 'tragœdia, concavis repercuſſionibus roborata, talem ſonum videtur efficere, ut 'pæne ab homine non credatur.' Caſſ. ep. 51, lib. 1.

On

On the Scenes, Machines and Decorations.

THOUGH we have no genuine or regular account now extant of the machines and decorations of the Greek theatre, we have ſufficient reaſon to conclude from the tragedies themſelves ſtill remaining, that ſuch things were made uſe of in the repreſentation; as we find in almoſt every one of them gods aſcending and deſcending, ghoſts and furies frequently appearing on the ſtage, with divinities celeſtial and terreſtrial; for all theſe, we need not doubt but that the antients had machines of various kinds, according to the various exigencies and circumſtances that required them; and, as we learn from the ſcatter'd remains of Heſychius, Pollux, and other writers, were no ſtrangers to * trap-doors, flying chariots, magnificent arches, flights, ropes, pullies, and in ſhort all the mechanical apparatus of the ſtage. As to the ſcenery, we know that the ſtrict regard paid by the Greek tragedians to the unity of place confined the whole repreſentation of their pieces to one particular ſpot; this however we find was ſumptuouſly adorn'd with all the embelliſhments, which art or nature could furniſh; magnificent † columns, porticos, ſtatues, paintings, baſſo-relievos, every thing, which the elegant taſte and genius of Greece could produce, was added to enrich the ſcene;

† Scenæ tragicæ (ſays Vitruvius) deformantur columnis, faſtigiis, & ſignis, reliquiſque regalibus rebus.

* Ἀναπεισματα, ſunt rudentes ſcenici quibus per tractoria organa latentes perſonæ ſuſtollebantur in ſcenam. Ἐωρημα, rudentes qui ex alto ſuſpenſi ſunt ut ſuſtineant eos qui aere ferri videntur. Pollux.

ſcene; even ſo early as in the time of Æſchylus, we are ‡ told that the decorations of the theatre were made according to the exacteſt rules of perſpective. The whole theatre (porticos excepted) being, as I before obſerved, uncover'd, and conſequently expoſed to the heat of the ſun, and inclemency of the weather; a kind of thin curtain, faſten'd probably to a large pillar or pole in the centre of the building, was extended over the whole; as the heat notwithſtanding (which is always the caſe in our modern tents) frequently penetrated through them, and the breaths of ſo numerous an aſſembly muſt have been offenſive, they had recourſe to artificial ſhowers of rain, which they convey'd from the top of the porticos through the ſtatues that were diſperſed over the different parts of the building; * Mr. Boindin adds, that the water on theſe occaſions was always ſcented, ſo that the ſpectators were not only refreſh'd by this gentle dew falling upon them, but at the ſame time regaled with the moſt exquiſite perfume.

‡ Tum Athenis, Agatarchus, Æſchylo docente, tragediam primus ſcenam fecit, & de eo commentarium reliquit, ex quo moniti Democritus & Anaxagoras de eadem re ſcripſerunt, quemadmodum oporteat ad aciem oculorum, radiorumque extenſionem, centro conſtituto ad lineas ratione naturali reſpondere; uti de re incertâ certæ imagines ædificiorum in ſcenarum picturis redderent ſpeciem, & quæ in directis planiſque frontibus ſint figurata, alia abſidentia, alia prominentia eſſe videantur. Vitruvius, lib. viii.

* As I do not remember that we have any authority from antient Greek writers for this anecdote, I ſhould rather be inclined to conſider the perfumed water as a refinement of modern luxury, and aſcribe it to the improvements of the Roman theatre.

On the MASQUES.

IT appears from the united teſtimonies of ſeveral antient writers, that the actors of Greece never appear'd on the ſtage in tragedy, or any other ſpecies of the drama without maſques: it is moſt probable, that before the time of Æſchylus, to whom ‖ Horace aſcribes this invention, they diſguiſed their features either, as in the days of Theſpis, by daubing them with the lees of wine, or by painting, falſe hair, and other artifices of the ſame kind with thoſe, which are practiced in the modern theatre: Maſques however were ſoon introduced, and look'd on, we may imagine, in thoſe days as a moſt ingenious device; that, which they made uſe of in tragedy, was, according to the beſt information we can gather concerning it, a kind of caſque or helmet, which cover'd the whole head, repreſenting not only the face, but the beard, hair, ears, and even, in the women's maſques, all the ornaments of the coif, or cap, being made of § different materials, according to the ſeveral

‖ Suidas and Athenæus attribute the invention of maſques to the poet Chœrilus. Horace gives the honour to Æſchylus; but Ariſtotle, who we may ſuppoſe was as well acquainted with this matter as any of them, fairly acknowledges himſelf entirely ignorant of it. 'Τις δε προσωπα, (ſays he) ατεδωκε, ηγνοηται.'

§ The firſt maſques were made of the leaves of a plant, to which the Greeks on this account gave the name of προσωπιον, 'quidam (ſays Pliny) Arcion 'perſonatam vocant, cujus folio nullum eſt latius.' Virgil mentions them as compoſed of the barks of trees,

Oraque corticibus ſumunt horrenda cavatis,

And Pollux tells us, that they were made of leather, lined with cloth or ſtuff, ενδοτεν δ' ωθονιον, εξωτεν δε σκυτινιον προσωπον.

ſeveral improvements, which it received from time to time; the moſt perfect and durable were of wood, executed with the greateſt care, by ſculptors of the firſt rank and eminence, who received their directions from the poet. It ſeems to have been an eſtabliſh'd opinion amongſt the antients, that their heroes and demigods, who were generally the ſubject of their tragedies, were of an extraordinary ſize, far ſurpaſſing that of common mortals; we muſt not be ſurpriſed therefore to find their tragic poets, in compliance with this popular prejudice, raiſing them upon ‡ the cothurnus, ſwelling them to an immenſe magnitude, and by the aſſiſtance of a § large and frightful maſque, endeavouring to fill the minds of the ſpectators with a religious awe, and veneration of them: the tragic maſques were generally copied from the buſts or ſtatues of the principal perſonages, and conſequently convey'd the moſt exact idea and reſemblance of them, which muſt have given an air of probability to the whole: thoſe, which repreſented * ghoſts and furies, were made ſtill more terrible and frightful; but

‡ The cothurnus, or buſkin, was a kind of large and high ſhoe, the ſole of which, being made of very thick wood, raiſed the actors to an extraordinary ſize; Juvenal tells us, that it made them appear extreamly tall, and compares an actreſs without her cothurnus to a pygmy,

——————breviorque videtur
Virgine pygmæa nullis adjuta cothurnis.

The cothurnus was probably of the ſame form as the high ſhoe, or piece of cork, bound about with tin or ſilver, worn by the Spaniſh women, call'd a chioppine, and which, it ſhould ſeem by a paſſage in Shakeſpear, was uſed on our own ſtage. 'Your ladyſhip is nearer heaven than when I ſaw you laſt 'by the altitude of a chioppine. Hamlet, act 2, ſcene 7.

§ The tragic maſques had large and expanded mouths, as if (ſays the humorous Lucian) they were about to devour the ſpectators, ὡς καταπιομένος τὺς θεατὰς.

* The maſque commonly uſed was call'd ſimply προσωπειον; the others, μορμολυκειον, and γοργονειον.

but the maſques of the || dancers, or perſons, who form'd the body of the chorus, had nothing diſagreeable.

As in the infancy of tragedy there were probably but few actors, the uſe of maſques gave each of them an opportunity of playing ſeveral parts, wherein the character, age, and ſex were different, without being diſcover'd; the large opening of the mouth was ſo contrived as to increaſe the ſound of the voice, and ſend it to the fartheſt part of the theatre, which was ſo extremely large and ſpacious, that without ſome ſuch aſſiſtance we cannot eaſily conceive how the actor could be well heard or ſeen; in all theatrical painting, ſcenery and decoration, the objects, we know, muſt be magnify'd beyond the life and reality, to produce their proper effect; and, in the ſame manner, we may imagine that, in ſo extenſive an area as the Greek theatre, it might be neceſſary to exaggerate the features, and enlarge the form of the actor; add to this, that at ſuch a diſtance as moſt of the ſpectators were, the natural expreſſion of the eyes and countenance muſt be entirely loſt. The ſanguine admirers of every thing that is antient bring many more arguments to defend the tragic * maſque; but after all that can be ſaid in it's favour, it is perhaps ſcarce defenſible; the face is certainly the beſt index of the mind, and the paſſions

 are

|| ' Τȣ δε ορχηςȣ σχημα (ſays Lucian) κοσμιον και ευπρεπες. Το δε προσωπον ' αυτο καλλιςον, τω υποκειμενω δραματι εοικος, ȣ κεχηνος, αλλα συμμεμυκος.'

* Maſques have had their admirers in modern as well as in antient times, and been uſed on more ſtages than that of Greece; even towards the middle of the laſt century, the actors both in tragedy and comedy on the French theatre wore maſques. The Engliſh is doubtleſs in this reſpect, as well as in many others, infinitely ſuperior to the Athenian ſtage; notwithſtanding which, I will promiſe to join the προσωποφιλοι, and vote for the reſtoration of the antient maſque, whenever they will ſhew me one that can repreſent the happy features of Quin, in the Character of Falſtaff, or give us an idea of a frantic Lear, like the look and face of the inimitable Garrick.

are as forcibly expreſs'd by the features, as by the words and geſture of the performer: the Greeks in this, as in many other particulars, ſacrificed propriety, truth and reaſon, to magnificence and vanity.

All the expences of the theatre were defray'd by the ſtate, and were indeed ſo conſiderable, that nothing but the purſe of an opulent republic could poſſibly have ſupported them, as it is confidently affirm'd by § hiſtorians that Athens ſpent more in dramatic repreſentations than in all her wars.

§ This aſſertion, which ſeems rather hyperbolical, is notwithſtanding ſupported by the grave Plutarch, who, ſpeaking of the Athenians, aſſures us, that the repreſentation of the Bacchanals, Phœniſſæ, OEdipus, Antigone, Medea, and Electra, coſt them more money than the defence of their own liberties in the field, or all their conteſts with the barbarians.

Of the time when Tragedy flouriſh'd in Greece.

IT was not my deſign in this ſhort Diſſertation (nor could indeed be comprehended within the limits of it) to point out with Ariſtotle what tragedy ought to be, but ſimply to ſhew what it was during the lives of the great triumvirate, as far as we can judge from the remains now extant; in my account of it's ſeveral parts therefore I have not follow'd the ſteps of the great critic, but principally confined myſelf to thoſe particulars, which diſtinguiſh the antient from the modern drama, and which may beſt enable us to form a proper and adequate idea of the Greek tragedy; but even the moſt perfect knowledge of all the eſſential and conſtituent parts will be found inſufficient for this purpoſe, unleſs we take into our view alſo the time when, and the very ſpot where every piece was exhibited. Dramatic, as well as every other ſpecies of poetry, is beſt known and diſtinguiſh'd by the place of it's birth; it will take it's form, colour, and complection from it's native ſoil, as naturally as water derives it's taſte and qualities from the different kinds of earth, through which it flows: it is abſolutely neceſſary, before we can judge impartially of the Greek tragedies, to tranſport ourſelves to the ſcene where they were repreſented, to ſhake off the Engliſhman for a time, and put on the Athenian.

IT has been with great truth remark'd, that there is allotted to every nation upon earth a particular period, which may be call'd their zenith of perfection, to which they approach by ſlow degrees, and from which, they gradually and inſenſibly recede: in this happy age of power and proſperity, the arts and ſciences,

taſte, genius, and literature have always ſhone with diſtinguiſh'd luſtre: ſuch was the time when Athens gave laws to all Greece, whilſt the glorious victories of Marathon and Salamis animated every tongue with eloquence, and fill'd every breaſt with exultation; that haughty and ſucceſsful people maintain'd for a long time her ſovereignty over the neighbouring nations; her councils were influenced by prudence, and her battles crown'd with conqueſt; the treaſure, which ſhe had ſeized in the temple at Delphos, enabled her not only to carry on her wars with ſucceſs, but left her a plentiful reſerve alſo to ſupply her luxuries: this was the age of heroes, philoſophers and poets; when architecture, painting, and ſculpture, foſter'd by the genial warmth of power and protection, ſo conſpicuouſly diſplay'd their ſeveral beauties, and produced all thoſe ſuperb monuments of antient taſte and genius, which united to diſtinguiſh this illuſtrious æra: during this happy period, tragedy appear'd in her meridian ſplendor, when the great triumvirate exhibited before the moſt polite and refined nation then upon earth thoſe excellent pieces, which extorted applauſe, honours and rewards, from their cotemporaries, and enſured to them the deſerved admiration of all poſterity: it may indeed with great truth be aſſerted, that the ſame remarkable love of order and ſimplicity, the ſame juſtneſs of ſymmetry and proportion, the ſame elegance, truth and ſublimity, which appear'd in the buildings, pictures and ſtatues of that age, are conſpicuous alſo in the antient drama.

In the time of the Greek tragedy, the Athenians dictated as it were to all mankind: proud by nature, and elated by riches and proſperity, they look'd down with the utmoſt contempt on the neighbouring nations, whom they ſtiled and treated as barbarians; as a republic, the avow'd enemies of monarchy and dependence; as a free people, bold and impatient of reſtraint or contradiction; ſtrongly attach'd to their own laws and cuſtoms; lively and active,

ive, but inconſtant and ſuperſtitious; their manners plain and ſimple, but their taſte at the ſame time elegant and refined. As the theatre was ſupported entirely at the expence of the public, the public directed all it's operations; we might naturally expect therefore, that the poet would for his own ſake take care to adapt his compoſitions to the public taſte; to fall in with national prejudices and ſuperſtitions; to ſooth the pride, flatter the ſelf-love, and adopt the opinions of his fellow-citizens: we muſt not wonder to hear, as we conſtantly do, (in the tragedies that remain) the praiſes of Athens perpetually reſounded, the ſuperiority of her laws and conſtitution extoll'd, and her form of government prefer'd to every other; oblique hints, or direct accuſations of folly and weakneſs in her enemies; public facts frequently alluded to, and public events recorded; their own feſtivals, ſacrifices, ‡ religious rites, and ceremonies, carefully and accurately deſcribed; Sparta and Thebes, as rival ſtates, occaſionally ſatyrized and condemn'd; and above all, every opportunity taken to point out the evils of monarchy, and engrave their favourite democratical principles on the hearts of the people: it is not improbable but that many of thoſe moral ſentences, and political apothegms, which at this diſtance of time appear cold and inſipid to us, had, beſides their general tendency, ſome double meaning, ſome alluſion to particular facts and circumſtances, which gave them an additional luſtre: without this key to the Greek theatre, it is impoſſible to form a right idea of antient tragedy, which was not, like our own, mere matter of amuſement, but the channel of public inſtruction, and the inſtrument of public policy; thoſe readers therefore, who are utterly unacquainted with the religion, laws, and cuſtoms of Athens, are by no means adequate judges of

‡ See, amongſt many other inſtances, the noble deſcription of the Pythian games, in the ſecond act of Electra, v. 1, p. 137, of my tranſlation of Sophocles, and the ſacred grove of the Eumenides, in the OEdipus Coloneus, v. 2, p. 292.

of it; they only § condemn, for the moſt part, what they do not underſtand, and raſhly judge of the whole edifice, whilſt they view but an inconſiderable part of the building. But ſo warmly are we attach'd to what lies before us, and ſo prejudiced in favour of thoſe modes and cuſtoms, which are eſtabliſh'd amongſt ourſelves, that we generally rate the merit of paſt performances by the ſtandard and rule of preſent practice; the antients therefore are ſubject to the diſadvantage of being tried, not as juſtice demands by their laws, but by our own.

And here it is worthy of our obſervation to remark, that the Greek tragedy ſeems, in it's whole progreſs, to have kept pace with the place of it's birth, and to have flouriſh'd and declined with it's native country: the riſe of Athens, from meanneſs and obſcurity to power and ſplendor, may be dated from the battle of Marathon, which laid the foundation of all her future glory; ſoon after which, we find Æſchylus forming his plan of antient tragedy; after him aroſe the immortal Sophocles, who improved upon, and greatly exceeded his illuſtrious maſter; to theſe ſucceeded Euripides, born ten years after the battle of Marathon, and on the very day of the ſea-fight at Salamis: whilſt theſe illuſtrious writers flouriſh'd, Athens flouriſh'd alſo, for above half a century: Euripides was fifty years of age, when the Peloponneſian war began; from which period the ſuperiority of Athens viſibly declined, and was ſoon entirely deſtroy'd by the rival power of Sparta, in confederacy with the Perſian monarch. Sophocles, happy in not ſurviving the honour and liberty of his country, expired one year before the taking of Athens by Lyſander, when the ſovereignty of Greece devolved to the Lacedæmonians.

§ Damnant quod non intelligunt. Quintilian.

Of

Of the three Great TRAGEDIANS.

ÆSCHYLUS was born at Athens, in the firſt year of the ‖ ſixtieth olympiad: he embraced very early in life the profeſſion of * arms, and diſtinguiſh'd himſelf as an officer at the famous battles of Marathon, Salamis and Platæa: the perpetual ſcenes of ſlaughter and bloodſhed, in which he was during a long ſeries of years unavoidably engaged, ſeem to have tinged his imagination with that portion of the fierce and terrible ſo diſtinguiſhable in all his pieces: during the intervals of his military occupation, he found time to write no leſs than ſeventy, or according to ſome hiſtorians, ninety tragedies, only ſeven of which are now extant: when he was pretty far advanced in years, he loſt the poetical prize to Sophocles, then but a boy, or, as other writers with more probability aſſert, to Simonides, in an elegy on the heroes, who fell at Marathon; a circumſtance, which ſo deeply affected him, that he immediately withdrew from Athens, and retired to the court of Hiero, king of Sicily, a friend of the muſes, whoſe palace was a kind of aſylum for the diſcontented poets of Greece; there, we are told, he lived in great affluence and ſplendor, to the age of ſixty-five; the writers of his life, not willing to admit that ſo great a poet could dye a common death, have thought proper to dignify his laſt moments with a circumſtance, which carries with it more of

‖ Five hundred and forty years before Chriſt.

* He had two brothers, who were likewiſe in the army, Cynegirus and Aminias: at the battle of Salamis, the former loſt his life, the latter one of his arms.

of the marvellous than the probable: an oracle had, it ſeems, declared (for oracles were always ready on theſe occaſions) that Æſchylus ſhould fall by the hand of heaven; accordingly, that this might be fulfill'd, it is reported that an eagle was ſeen in the air, holding in her talons a tortoiſe, which (unfortunately for the bard) ſhe let go, and dropping on the head of Æſchylus, who happen'd to be walking beneath, fractured his ſkull: he is ſaid to have gain'd thirteen victories over his rival poets, which one would think was an ample recompence for the ſingle failure that gave him ſo much uneaſineſs. His tragedies were greatly admired during his life, and after his death held in the higheſt eſteem, inſomuch that a decree was paſs'd by the ſenate, declaring, that if any perſon would exhibit the tragedies of Æſchylus, the ſtate would bear the charges of the chorus, and defray the whole expence of the repreſentation; an honour, which probably had not been beſtow'd on any poet before his time, though afterwards, as I obſerved above, they were generally play'd at the public coſt.

Æschylus is a bold, nervous, animated writer; his imagination fertile, but licentious; his judgment true, but ungovern'd; his genius lively, but uncultivated; his ſentiments noble and ſublime, but at the ſame time wild, irregular, and frequently fantaſtic; his plots, for the moſt part, rude and inartificial; his ſcenes unconnected, and ill-placed; his language generally poignant and expreſſive, though in many places turgid and obſcure, and even too often degenerating into fuſtian and bombaſt; his characters ſtrongly mark'd, but all partaking of that wild fierceneſs, which is the characteriſtic of their author; his peculiar excellency was in raiſing terror and aſtoniſhment, in warm and deſcriptive ſcenes of war and ſlaughter: if we conſider the ſtate of the drama when he undertook to reform and improve it, we ſhall behold him with admiration; if we compare him with his two illuſtrious ſucceſſors

ſucceſſor he hides his diminiſh'd head, and appears far leſs conſpicuous: were we to draw a parallel between dramatic poetry and painting, we ſhould perhaps ſtile him the Julio Romano of antient tragedy.

SOPHOCLES was born at Colonè, a burgh or village in Attica; his father Sophilus was, as ſome writers tell us, a * blackſmith; or, according to a more favourable heraldry, maſter of a forge: as the profeſſion of arms was at that time more honourable, and probably more advantageous than any other, Sophocles enter'd into it, and follow'd the ſteps of his maſter Æſchylus, both as a ſoldier and a poet; in the former capacity he had the honour to ſerve under the great § Pericles. As a dramatic writer he was early diſtinguiſh'd for his extraordinary abilities, which firſt placed him on a level, and afterwards raiſed him to a ſuperiority over his illuſtrious rival; he is ſuppoſed to have written one hundred and twenty tragedies, only ſeven of which are now remaining; theſe were received by his cotemporaries with the applauſe they ſo highly deſerved: it is remark'd, that he never acted himſelf in any of his plays, as Æſchylus and Euripides did, his voice being too weak and low for the ſtage; though he was always preſent at the repreſentation, and received the applauſes of the audience, who, we are told, ſeldom fail'd to ſignify their approbation by a loud and general clap, both at his entrance into, and leaving the theatre: he was crown'd twenty

 times,

* Much ink has been ſhed by the commentators on this ſubject, both with regard to Sophocles and Demoſthenes alſo, who was, it ſeems, in the ſame predicament, it not being determined whether his father was a vulcan or a common cyclop.

§ Pericles, if we may believe Athenæus, uſed to ſay that Sophocles was a good ſoldier, but a bad officer; a circumſtance, which, if he had not ſucceeded better as a poet, it is probable would never have reach'd poſterity.

times, and though he probably ſometimes ſhared the fate of his brother poets by unjuſt cenſure, could never be prevail'd on, as his rivals were, to leave his native country, to which he took || every opportunity of ſhewing his ſincereſt attachment: with regard to his death, hiſtorians (if ſcholiaſts and commentators may be ſo call'd) have indulged themſelves in the ſame liberty, which they took with his predeceſſor Æſchylus; ſome kill him with a grape-ſtone; others tell us, that he died with joy at being crown'd for one of his tragedies; whilſt a third ſet gravely aſſure us, that having one day an inclination to play a part in his own Antigone, he dipp'd into a ſpeech too long for his weak lungs, and expired, merely for want of a better breath, in the midſt of it.

After all, as Sophocles, according to various teſtimonies, lived till ninety, it is not improbable that he might have died of ‡ extreme old age, a diſtemper, which is ſeldom perhaps more favourable to poets than to other men: the Athenians erected a ſumptuous monument in memory of him, on which was engraved a ſwarm of § bees, in alluſion to the name generally given him on

|| It is with great reaſon imagined, that Sophocles laid the ſcene of his latter OEdipus in Colonè, with a purpoſed deſign of doing honour to the place of his nativity.

‡ The ſtory of his ſons ingratitude, told by Plutarch and others, is omitted here, becauſe my readers will find it related in my notes on the tranſlation of the OEdipus Coloneus. See v. 2, p. 289.

Sophocles had ſeveral children, one of which, whoſe name was Iophon, is ſaid to have inherited the dramatic genius of his father, and to have written four tragedies, the names only of which are come down to us, viz. Ilium, Achilles, Telephus, and Actæon.

§ Sophocles was univerſally ſtiled, the Bee. Some commentators have taken the bees from off his tomb, and hived them in his cradle, aſſuring us, that when Sophocles was an infant, a ſwarm of them was ſeen to alight upon his lips, which was at that time look'd on as a preſage of his future eloquence.

on account of his verſes, which are indeed wonderfully ſoft and harmonious, or, as a nobler poet even than Sophocles himſelf expreſſes it, ſweeter than honey, or the honey-comb.

Sophocles may with great truth be call'd the prince of antient dramatic poets; his fables, at leaſt of all thoſe tragedies now extant, are intereſting and well-choſen, his plots regular and well-conducted, his ſentiments elegant, noble and ſublime, his incidents natural, his diction ſimple, his manners and characters ſtriking, equal and unexceptionable, his choruſſes well adapted to the ſubject, his moral reflections pertinent and uſeful, and his numbers in every part to the laſt degree ſweet and harmonious; the warmth of his imagination is ſo temper'd by the perfection of his judgment, that his ſpirit however animated never wanders into licentiouſneſs, whilſt at the ſame time the fire of his genius ſeldom ſuffers the moſt unintereſting parts of his tragedy to ſink into coldneſs and inſipidity; his peculiar excellence ſeems to lye in the † deſcriptive; and, excluſive of his dramatic powers, he is certainly a greater poet than either of his illuſtrious rivals: were I to draw a ſimilitude of him, as I did of Æſchylus, from painting, I ſhould ſay that his ordonnance was ſo juſt, his figures ſo well group'd and contraſted, his colours ſo glowing and natural, all his pieces in ſhort executed in ſo bold and maſterly a ſtile, as to wreſt the palm from every other hand, and point him out as the Raphael of the antient drama.

EURIPIDES, the ſon of Mneſarchus and Clito, was a native of Salamis, to which place his parents had withdrawn to ſhelter themſelves from the ſtorm of war with which Greece was threaten'd by the invaſion of Xerxes; he was born in the ſecond

† For a proof of this, I would refer my readers to his fine deſcription of the Pythian games in the Electra; the diſtreſs of Philoctetes in Lemnos; and the praiſes of Athens in the OEdipus Coloneus.

year of the * ſeventy-fifth olympiad, in the midſt of all the triumphal pomp, which follow'd the famous victories of Salamis and Platæa: as the genius of Euripides was not turn'd like that of his two predeceſſors towards a military life, he attach'd himſelf to philoſophy, at that time the faſhionable taſte and ſtudy of all Greece, under the celebrated || Anaxagoras; but partly perhaps from the fear of incurring his maſter's fate, and partly from the natural bent of his own mind, ſoon left the perplexing paths of ſcience, and gave himſelf up to the more inviting charms of poetry: as the ſtage was probably then, as it is now, far the moſt lucrative branch of it, he applied himſelf early to the writing of tragedies, in which he ſucceeded ſo well, as to enter the liſts with Æſchylus and Sophocles: the immortal Socrates, to whom we may ſuppoſe he was in a great meaſure indebted for the applauſe and encouragement beſtow'd on him, not only honour'd him with his patronage and protection, but enter'd into the moſt intimate friendſhip and connection with him; he is even ſaid to have aſſiſted him in ſeveral of his plays; the moral and philoſophic air, which runs through them all, ſeems indeed greatly to favour this opinion, which was induſtriouſly propagated by his § enemies, to obſcure if poſſible the luſtre of ſuch conſpicuous merit;

* Four hundred ſeventy five years before Chriſt.

|| Anaxagoras, amongſt many other new opinions advanced by him, had aſſerted that the ſun was a globe of fire, which gave ſo much offence to the ignorance and ſuperſtition of his countrymen, that he was forced to ſubmit to a voluntary exile, as the only means of ſaving his life, which would otherwiſe have fallen a ſacrifice to the enraged multitude.

§ Diogenes Laertius, ſpeaking of Socrates, ſays, εδοκει συμποιειν Ευριπιδη. Mneſilochus told the Athenians, that Euripides was only a hammer-man to Socrates, and calls him Ευριπιδης Σωκρατογομφευς; the comic poets frequently reproach him for his obligations to the philoſopher.

merit; he gain'd ‡ five victories, and is ſuppoſed to have written ſeventy-five tragedies, only nineteen of which are now extant; ſome * letters of Euripides, handed down to us, take notice of a quarrel between him and Sophocles, and give an account alſo of their perfect reconciliation; though his tragedies were for the moſt part well received by his cotemporaries, we may imagine that, like other poets, he met with ſome ill treatment from them, as we find him in the latter part of his life at the court of Archelaus, king of Macedon, who loaded him with favours, and treated him with all the reſpect due to his character and abilities; there, we are told, he lived in great affluence and ſplendor about three years, when unfortunately wandering one day into a ſolitary place, he was ſet on by a pack of hounds, and ‖ torn to pieces, at the age of ſeventy-five. Aulus Gellius informs us, that the Athenians ſent to Macedon for his body, and had prepared to grace it with a pompous and ſplendid funeral, but the Macedonians refuſing to deliver it, they contented themſelves with erecting a magnificent tomb to his memory, and graving his name and honours on the empty marble; a copy of his works was carefully depoſited amongſt the archives, and ſo highly eſteem'd, that a king of Ægypt in vain for a long time ſolicited a copy of them, which the

‡ Some commentators correct the text of A. Gellius, and make it fifteen.

* The Engliſh reader may find theſe letters at the end of my tranſlation of the Epiſtles of Phalaris, publiſh'd in 1749.

‖ One of his biographers acquaints us, that the dogs were planted there on purpoſe, and ſet on by a brother bard, grown jealous of his riſing reputation, who took this opportunity to diſpatch him; whether there be any truth in the whole ſtory is extremely diſputable; the author however might very well expect to gain credit for it, as it has been cuſtomary time out of mind, and continues ſo to this day, for rival poets to tear one another to pieces.

the Athenians poſitively refuſed, till a famine happening in Greece, the king in return refuſed to ſell them corn; neceſſity at laſt prevailing, they parted with the manuſcript, and the king acknowledged ſo ſingular a favour, by permitting the merchants of Athens to take away as much corn as they wanted, without paying the uſual tribute.

In ſuch high eſteem were the works of this poet, that many noble Athenians being taken priſoners at ‡ Syracuſe, the unfortunate captives were all put to death, except thoſe, who could repeat any paſſages from the plays of Euripides; theſe men, and theſe alone they pardon'd, careſs'd, treated with the utmoſt reſpect, and afterwards ſet them at liberty.

Euripides, fortunately for his own character as well as for poſterity, is come down to us more perfect and entire than either of his cotemporaries; his merit therefore is more eaſily aſcertain'd; his fables are generally intereſting, his plots frequently irregular and artificial, his characters ſometimes unequal, but for the moſt part ſtriking and well contraſted, his ſentiments remarkably fine, juſt and proper, his diction ſoft, elegant, and perſuaſive; he abounds much more in moral apophthegms and reflections than Æſchylus or Sophocles, which as they are not always introduced with propriety give ſome of his tragedies a ſtiff and ſcholaſtic appearance, with which the ſeverer critics have not fail'd to reproach him: it is moſt probable however that in this he complied with the taſte of his age, and in obedience to the dictates of his friend and maſter Socrates, who, we may ſuppoſe, thought it no diſgrace to this favourite poet, to deviate from the rigid rules of the drama, in order to render it more ſubſervient to the noble purpoſes of piety and virtue; there is beſides

‡ This ſtory is told at large, in a ſmall and elegant tract lately publiſh'd, intitled, an Eſſay on the influence of Philoſophy upon the fine arts, p. 21.

ſides in his dialogue a didactic and argumentative turn, which ſavours ſtrongly of the Socratic diſputant, and which probably procured him the name of the * philoſopher of the theatre.

It is ſaid of Sophocles, that he painted men as they ought to be; of Euripides, that he painted them as they were; a quaint remark, which I ſhall leave the critics to comment and explain, only obſerving, that the latter is much more familiar than the former, deſcends much lower into private life, and conſequently lets down in ſome meaſure the dignity of the buſkin, which in Sophocles is always carefully ſupported: there are ſome ſcenes in Euripides where the ideas are ſo courſe, and the expreſſion ſo low and vulgar, as, if tranſlated with the utmoſt caution, would perhaps greatly ſhock the delicacy and refinement of modern manners; the feeling reader notwithſtanding will be amply recompenced by that large portion of the tender and pathetic, the peculiar excellency of this poet, which is diffuſed throughout his works; his choruſſes are remarkably beautiful and poetical, they do not indeed, as Ariſtotle has obſerved, always naturally ariſe from and correſpond with the incidents of the drama; this fault however his choruſſes generally make amends for by the harmony of their numbers, and the many fine moral and religious ſentiments, which they contain.

Upon the whole, though Euripides had not perhaps ſo ſublime a genius as Æſchylus, or a judgment ſo perfect as Sophocles, he ſeems to have written more to the heart than either of them; and if I were to place him with the other two in the ſchool of painters, I ſhould be inclined, from the ſoftneſs of his pencil, to call him the Corregio of the antient drama.

* ὁ φιλοσοφος της σκηνης.

FROM

FROM the works of theſe three illuſtrious writers, and from them § alone we muſt draw all our knowledge of the antient Greek tragedy, which in the view we have here taken of it appears to be full, complete and perfect, and has been miſerably disjointed and torn to pieces by the moderns: from the ruins of this noble edifice have ariſen two very imperfect ſtructures, the opera and tragedy of latter times, both greatly though not equally defective, the former, confining itſelf merely to the eye and ear, makes but a ſlight impreſſion on the mind, whilſt the latter, from it's omiſſion of the chorus, muſic, ſcenery, and decoration, falls ſhort of that beauty and perfection, which is only to be found in the antient drama; we muſt at the ſame time fairly acknowledge that our manners and cuſtoms, our opinions, views, taſte and judgment, are ſo different from thoſe of Greece, that her drama is by no means in every reſpect a proper model and ſtandard for modern poets, and muſt, after all we can advance in it's favour, always remain among thoſe reproachful monuments of the purity and ſimplicity of former ages, which we cannot imitate though we are forced to admire.

IT muſt be confeſs'd, that antient tragedy hath it's ſhare with every thing elſe of human imperfection: too ſtrict an attention to the unities hath fetter'd and confined it; many of it's beauties are merely local and temporal; the plots are frequently unintereſting,

§ Of all the Greek tragedies produced by various writers, and which are almoſt innumerable, we have only thirty-three now remaining, though according to the generally received account, no leſs than two hundred and ſixty or upwards were written only by the three great tragedians; all the reſt, except a few inconſiderable fragments, fell a ſacrifice to barbarity, and are buried in oblivion.

unintereſting, and ill-conducted, the ſpeeches either too long or too ſhort, the expreſſions ſometimes courſe and indelicate; in the general management and repreſentation of the whole, too much is ſacrificed to popular prejudice, ſuperſtition and vanity, the ruling paſſions of an Athenian audience: too ſtrong an attachment to the laws, cuſtoms, and form of government then prevailing, threw a dull air of uniformity over the drama; the ſame ſtory, the ſame characters and ſentiments, even the ſame expreſſions too often occur in different tragedies; that ſimplicity, which ſo diſtinguiſh'd the manners of the antients, had naturally it's influence over their taſte alſo; they ſelected one plain but noble object, and all the variety, which their dramatic poets aim'd at, or which the ſpectators required of them, was to place that in different lights, without ſuffering any other to intercept the proſpect of it; they admitted no epiſodes, under-plots, or any of thoſe extraneous incidental ornaments, which make up modern performances, § and confined themſeves principally to the faults and perfections of the great, as Milton obſerves of them,

'High actions, and high paſſions beſt deſcribing;'

But becauſe their taſte was more correct and ſevere, it doth by no means follow, that it was leſs true and perfect than our own: the moderns heap incident on incident, ſentiment on ſentiment, and character on character; a change, which is perhaps rather to be attributed to the corruption of our taſte than to the improvement of it: it is always a mark of a vitiated ſtomach, when

§ One of the greateſt advantages of modern tragedy over the antient is perhaps it's judicious deſcent from the adventures of demi-gods, kings, and heroes, into the humbler walk of private life, which is much more intereſting to the generality of mankind.

wholſome and natural food is rejected with diſguſt, and provocatives uſed to raiſe the appetite; in the ſame manner, I cannot but be of opinion, that our impatient thirſt after what critics affect to call buſineſs is nothing but the reſult of falſe taſte, and depraved judgment: becauſe antient tragedy is not crowded with a heap of unnatural epiſodes, ſtuff'd with ſimilies, metaphors, imagery and poetical flowers, the moderns treat it with contempt, and find nothing in it but a poverty of ſentiment, a want of order and connection in the ſcenes, a flatneſs and inſipidity in the dialogue, a coarſeneſs and indelicacy in the expreſſion; but even if we ſhould grant the truth of every objection, there would ſtill remain, to compenſate for all theſe real or ſeeming imperfections, a variety of true and ſtriking beauties: in antient tragedy, and there only, we ſhall find a moſt exact and faithful picture of the manners of Greece, it's religious and civil policy, ſublimity both of ſentiment and diction, regularity, ſymmetry and proportion, excellent moral aphoriſms and reflections, together with a moſt elegant and amiable ſimplicity diffuſed through every page.

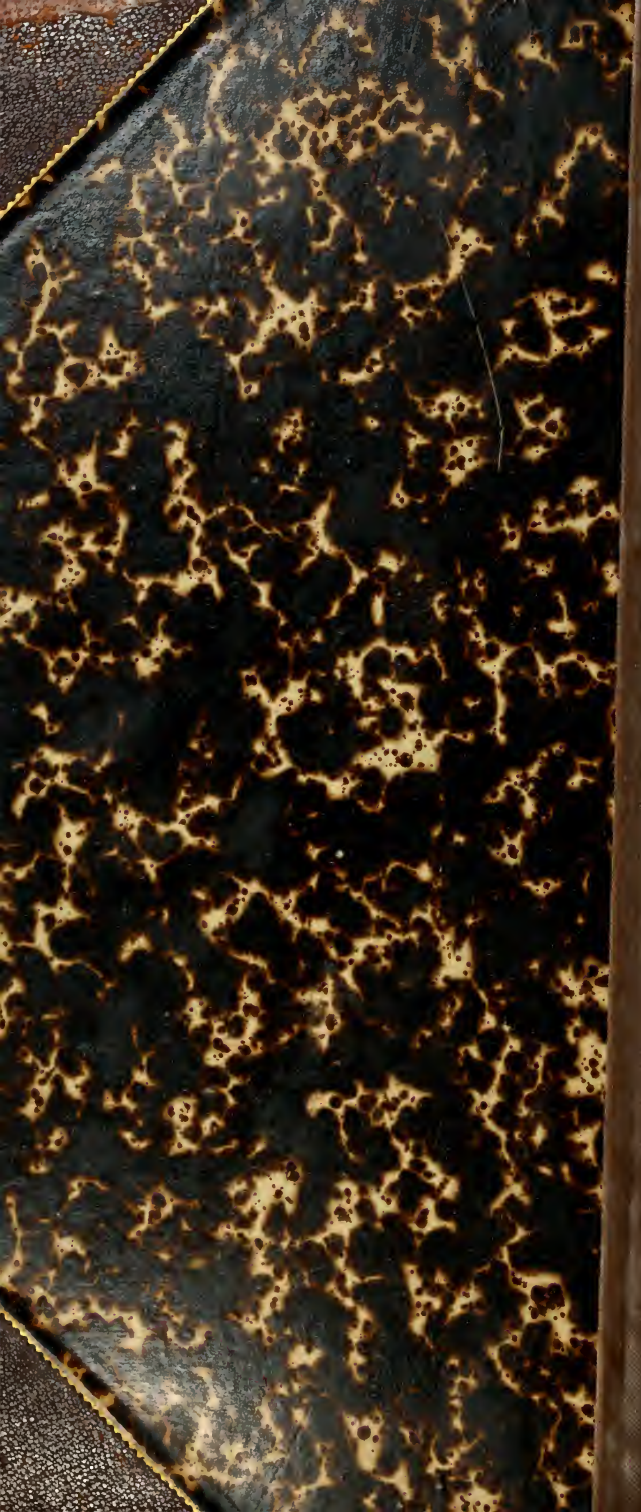
In a word, to affirm, as many who have more learning than judgment ſometimes will, that there are no good tragedies but the antient, is the affectation of ſcholaſtic pedantry; to deny them their deſerved applauſe, and treat them with ridicule and contempt, is, on the other hand, the effect of modern pride, ignorance, and petulancy: upon the whole, French, Italian, Spaniſh and German critics, may perhaps find ſome excuſe for their ſevere animadverſions on the antient Greek tragedy; it may exerciſe their envy, and find employment for their ſpleen and ill-nature, as they have nothing of their own to put in competition with it; but Engliſhmen ſhould be above ſuch envy,

and

and ſuch malevolence, becauſe they can boaſt a dramatic writer, ſuperior to all that antiquity ever produced: we may ſafely join with the moſt ſanguine partiſans of Æſchylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, in the ſincereſt admiration of their ſeveral excellencies, and rejoice within ourſelves to ſee them all united and ſurpaſs'd in the immortal and inimitable Shakeſpear.

FINIS.

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

HaSS
B
262